Kierkegaard

ON FAITH AND THE SELF

COLLECTED ESSAYS

C. STEPHEN EVANS

Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self

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Collected Essays

C. Stephen Evans

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Preface

It seems like a long time since I first read Kierkegaard as a freshman at Wheaton College. I remember the course well: Stuart Hackett's "Introduction to Ethics," and the book read was *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, the Douglas Steere translation in the Harper Torchbook edition. I later passed the book on to the woman who would become my wife, and it served as her introduction to Kierkegaard as well. (She has since gone on to publish a book on Kierkegaard's influence on Miguel de Unamuno.) The year was 1965, which means that I have been reading Kierkegaard for forty years, give or take a year.

My devotion to Kierkegaard, however, has never prevented other interests, and even my doctoral dissertation, later published as *Subjectivity and Religious Belief*, only dealt with Kierkegaard in one chapter. Two years after completing my dissertation, I was floundering as a scholar, lacking a clear direction and research agenda. Someone—I wish I could remember who it was—told me I should focus on one historical figure. I chose Kierkegaard, and it is a choice I have never regretted. After making a trip to St. Olaf to meet Howard Hong, I was inspired to learn Danish. My wife Jan joined me in this quest, and two years later we were (temporarily) living in Denmark, and I was writing my first scholarly book on Kierkegaard.

Over the years I have found Kierkegaard a fecund source of inspiration and ideas on all kinds of issues. Though I have often found myself disagreeing with him, I have never found him dull and never found him less than

provocative. I think there are few philosophers I could have read for forty years with delight and continual surprise.

Through these years I have published a lot of essays on Kierkegaard. Many of these appeared in obscure places and are now hard to find. When I recently went back and reread some of them, it seemed to me that they possessed a consistency of purpose and interpretive vision that made it worthwhile to put them together in book form, and that is what I have done. I have of course revised most of the essays for this volume. But the revisions, for the most part, are not major, because they embody a common vision that has developed but not fundamentally changed over the last twenty-five years. Kierkegaard himself, in reflecting on his own authorship in *The Point of View*, claims there is a unity of purpose to be found in his works. However, he does not claim that this unity was the result of any plan he had from the beginning, but rather he attributes it to the work of "Governance" or providence. When I look back on my own scholarly achievement, which would be laughable to compare with Kierkegaard's, I feel driven to make the same kind of attribution. When I began to write these essays, I was very far from having a detailed plan of attack. Nevertheless, in retrospect, my interpretive labors with respect to Kierkegaard constitute a consistent program to me. I feel a certain wonder when I read my own work. Through the years my thinking about Kierkegaard has surely developed, as my knowledge of his works and the secondary literature has grown. However, the kernel of my way of reading Kierkegaard was present from the beginning. The intuitions that guided my early work have been fruitful—at least to me. I hope that others will find them so as well.

I owe a huge thank you to Sean Riley, who performed the herculean task of converting Kierkegaard references to the system of SIGLA used. I must also thank the staff of Baylor University Press, who have labored over the text in many ways. I am grateful as well to James Bouwmeester, who prepared the index.

I must close by thanking my wonderful wife, who has shared so much of her life with me, and shared so many of my loves, including my love for Kierkegaard. The essays that compose this book would not have been possible without her.

C. Stephen Evans
Waco, Texas
December 1, 2004

A Note on Citations from Kierkegaard

The essays that compose this book were written over a thirty-year period. During that period, new translations of Kierkegaard's works appeared in English. This has led to differences in how I cited Kierkegaard in these essays. Some of my earlier essays drew on the older translations of David Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Some of the newer essays cited the new Hong edition of *Kierkegaard's Writings* from Princeton University Press. In many essays I used my own translations directly from the Danish, employing the first edition of the *Samlede Værker* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1901–1906). For this volume, I have retranslated all direct quotations from Kierkegaard using this edition.

Since many of the Lowrie and Swenson translations are no longer in print, I wanted in this book to give a reference to the Princeton edition of *Kierkegaard's Writings*, for the convenience of readers, since this edition is currently both available and the best scholarly edition in English. Hence I have decided to standardize references to Kierkegaard, and to cite the pagination of the Hong edition *in every case*. This will allow the reader always to be able to find the relevant passage in an available English edition to examine the context of a quotation. Since the Hong edition contains the pagination of the first edition of the *Samlede Værker* in the margins, readers who wish to consult the Danish for themselves can easily do so. Allow me to repeat for emphasis that the actual translations for quotations of Kierkegaard

used for this edition are my own in all cases, though I have no doubt been influenced by both older and newer existing translations.

I am a great admirer of the system of SIGLA developed by Robert Perkins for the International Kierkegaard Commentary series published by Mercer University Press, and I decided to employ it in this work, thus greatly reducing the number of footnotes. Kierkegaard's works are cited by giving an abbreviation for each in parentheses in the text, followed by a page number. I am grateful both to Robert Perkins and to Mercer University Press for permission to use the SIGLA. On the following pages I append a list of Kierkegaard's works cited and the corresponding abbreviations for those works.

SIGLA

AN	"Armed Neutrality." See *The Point of View* (PV).
BA	*The Book on Adler*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
C	*The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. See *Christian Discourses* (CD).
CA	*The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
CD	*Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
CI	*The Concept of Irony* and "Notes on Schelling's Berlin Lectures," trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
COR	*The Corsair Affair*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.
CUP	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, 2 vols., trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
EO	*Either/Or*, 2 vols., trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

EPW	*Early Polemical Writings* and *From the Papers of One Still Living*, trans. Julia Watkin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
EUD	*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
FPOSL	*From the Papers of One Still Living*. See *Early Polemical Writings* (EPW).
FSE	*For Self-Examination* and *Judge for Yourself!*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
FT	*Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
JC	*Johannes Climacus* or *De omnibus dubitandum est*. See *Philosophical Fragments* (PF).
JFY	*Judge for Yourself!* See *For Self-Examination* (FSE).
JP	*Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, vol. 1, 1967; vol. 2, 1970; vols. 3– 4, 1975; vols. 5–7, 1978.
LD	*Letters and Documents*, trans. Hendrik Rosenmeier. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
NA	Newspaper Articles, 1854–1855. See *"The Moment"* (TM).
NSBL	"Notes on Schelling's Berlin Lectures." See *The Concept of Irony* (CI).
OMWA	*On My Work as an Author*. See *The Point of View* (PV).
P	*Prefaces* and "Writing Sampler," trans. Todd W. Nichol. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
PC	*Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
PF	*Philosophical Fragments* and *Johannes Climacus*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
PV	*The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, "The Single Individual," *On My Work as an Author,* and "Armed Neutrality," trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
R	*Repetition*. See *Fear and Trembling* (FT).
SLW	*Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
SUD	*The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

TA	*Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age. A Literary Review*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
TDIO	*Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
TM	*"The Moment" and Late Writings* and Newspaper Articles, 1845–1855, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Prince-ton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
TSI	"The Single Individual." See *The Point of View* (PV).
UDVS	*Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
WA	*Without Authority*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
WL	*Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
WS	"Writing Sampler." See *Prefaces* (P).

PART ONE

Introduction

Chapter 1

Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker

There are almost as many ways of reading Kierkegaard as there are readers of Kierkegaard. Bursting onto the English-speaking intellectual world in the forties and fifties of the twentieth century like a long-delayed time bomb, Kierkegaard was first read as the "father of existentialism," the inspirer of Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Unamuno. In the contemporary intellectual world, philosophers such as John Caputo and Merold Westphal see Kierkegaard as a proto-postmodernist.[1] The "multivocity" that is displayed in the panoply of pseudonymous "characters" that Kierkegaard employed makes such a reading understandable. Another large group of Kierkegaard interpreters see him as linked to Wittgenstein. Some, such as James Conant, are enamored with the early Wittgenstein, and see a strong similarity between Wittgenstein's distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown and Kierkegaard's reflections on the limits of human thinking.[2] Others, such as Robert Roberts, are more drawn to the later Wittgenstein, with his detailed attention to "language games" and attempts to discern the "deep grammar" embedded in our linguistic practices. They see a parallel with Kierkegaard's attempts to distinguish carefully between the "grammar" of authentically Christian ways of talking about the ethical and the self and the forms of thought characteristic of paganism and "Christendom," that confused form of paganism.[3]

All of these ways of reading Kierkegaard have led to illuminating discoveries. Perhaps it is one sign of the greatness of Kierkegaard that he seems to

have something to say to almost everyone. Secular existentialists and postmodernists, neo-orthodox or dialectical Christian theologians, Catholics and Anabaptists—all have found Kierkegaard to be a "spiritual brother." Without in any way denying or minimizing Kierkegaard's genius, which continues to produce amazement and awe in me after reading him for forty years, I am convinced that the heart of Kierkegaard's thought lies in the "mere Christianity" that lay so close to his own heart. Kierkegaard himself found it ironical that he should be the object of interest because of his aesthetic and philosophical brilliance, when in reality this aesthetic brilliance was merely an appearance in which "the religious author hid himself" (PV 69–70).

Kierkegaard saw himself as one who was "duty-bound to the service of Christianity" and whose task as an author was to "set forth this simple issue: to become a Christian" (PV 93–94). What he really wanted to communicate was "the old, well-known text, handed down by the fathers" (CUP 1:630). Part of Kierkegaard's genius is his ability to see and dramatize the power and relevance of ancient ways of thinking. Some of his inspiration surely came from the Greeks, particularly the figure of Socrates, but anyone who notices the massively Biblical content of his writings will recognize that the Christianity he learned from his father was by far the preeminent influence. If this is correct, then the vitality of Kierkegaard's thought is testimony to the power still present in the Christian message.

From my earliest encounter as an undergraduate with Kierkegaard, I have been convinced that Kierkegaard had something important to say *as a Christian* to the contemporary world. From the beginning it seemed to me that he had two fundamental messages: One, directed primarily to the Church, concerned the deadening effects of "Christendom," and the need to clearly understand that becoming a Christian is not simply to absorb a particular culture, whether that culture be construed as Danish, European, "Western," American, Texan, or whatever. For Kierkegaard, when Christianity is identified with culture, the "second birth" is confused with being born; in such a situation it is difficult for anyone to become a Christian in truth because everyone is a Christian of a sort. Being a Christian is confused with being a nice, respectable person, the kind of person who works hard, fulfills family responsibilities, and perhaps even goes to church on Sundays now and then. Such a Christianity makes no real difference to anything or anyone, and Kierkegaard saw very clearly that its major function was simply to legitimize the status quo of an emerging bourgeois culture.

The second message, directed primarily at the secular world, concerns the causes for the post-Enlightenment decline of Christian faith. As Kierkegaard saw things, the common diagnoses of this decline are wrong-

headed. Christian belief has not declined because people have become more rational or more scientific, or because philosophers such as Hume and Kant attacked the philosophical arguments for theism. If faith has ebbed, it is not because people are generally more enlightened, but because they have become more impoverished in their grasp of what human life is about and why it should be lived. Rather than seeing contemporary Europeans as intellectual giants in relation to their forebears, Kierkegaard saw them as people who were imaginative midgets, lacking the capacity for the deep "passions" that make human life worth living.

These are important messages indeed, and in my own work on Kierkegaard I have seen it as my primary task to help my readers hear Kierkegaard speak to them directly. One might think that such work on my part, however humble, would be superfluous. After all, Kierkegaard has been translated, and in the case of many of his books, more than once. However, I believe that for some Kierkegaard's voice has not been heard clearly, primarily because of deeply rooted traditions of misinterpretation. These readers of Kierkegaard do not really understand him because they approach the text with the illusion that they *already* understand him. This is true for both secular and religious readers.

A classic example of this kind of misreading is found in the work of theologian and Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer. However, before criticizing Schaeffer's reading of Kierkegaard, I first want to express a word of appreciation. I myself heard Schaeffer give several series of lectures during my years as an undergraduate, the contents of which later appeared as *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who Is There*.[4] Those lectures were electrifying. Like many young Christian intellectuals of my era, I was excited by Schaeffer's attempt to understand the crisis of Western civilization as spiritually rooted. Having grown up in a family of modest intellectual ambitions, it was transfixing to see a Christian mind engaged with philosophy, art, science, and culture at large. I am sure that I owe to Schaeffer some of my own interests in doing philosophy as a Christian.

Ironically, however, the Christian philosopher who has come to mean the most to me was portrayed by Schaeffer as one of the villains in his grand story of how Western culture turned away from orthodox Christian belief. As Schaeffer told the story, Western culture bifurcated faith from reason, leaving reason to go its autonomous way. In moving away from a Christian worldview, reason gradually moved towards a mechanistic perspective that left no room for meaningful and purposeful human existence. Unable to live in such a mechanistic, meaningless world, modern humans have themselves embraced the irrational, with a bifurcated worldview. Symbolizing this

bifurcation with a horizontal "line of despair," Schaeffer claimed that below this line modern humans embrace a scientistic, mechanistic world that offers no moral values and no reason for living. Above the line, in the "upper story," modern humans have embraced a variety of spiritual options, such as "new age" religion and Western versions of Eastern religions. These upper-story commitments have no rational backing; they are grounded in an irrational leap of faith, motivated by the need for meaning and the inability to accept a mechanistic world.

For Schaeffer, Søren Kierkegaard was the first thinker to recognize the bankruptcy of the mechanistic worldview and posit "the leap of faith." It is true that Kierkegaard's leap was to Christian faith and not some new age substitute, and Schaeffer recognized Kierkegaard's Christianity and even praised some of Kierkegaard's devotional writings. However, as Schaeffer saw things, Kierkegaard tried to ground Christianity in an irrational leap of faith; he was the author of the bifurcated universe that has become the home of the modern intellectual.

As a result of Schaeffer's treatment of Kierkegaard, several generations of evangelical Christians have been taught that Kierkegaard is part of the problem rather than the solution. In teaching these students, at institutions such as Wheaton College and Calvin College, I have had to first help them unlearn what they "knew" about Kierkegaard. When I get these students to read Kierkegaard with fresh eyes, they invariably see that Schaeffer's reading of Kierkegaard is flawed. The irony is that at certain points Kierkegaard's reading of the history of Western culture parallels Schaeffer's own view. Certainly, a serious encounter with Kierkegaard could have deepened Schaeffer's understanding, both of the problems and the cure.

It would be a mistake to lay too much blame at Schaeffer's feet, however. In many ways Schaeffer simply reflects the popular view of Kierkegaard, one that is derived largely from Albert Camus, and which I am confident Schaeffer encountered in the young intellectuals influenced by existentialism from Europe and American who showed up at L'Abri (Schaeffer's intellectual mission) in Switzerland in the 1950s and 1960s. As Camus tells the tale, Kierkegaard was the first to recognize the absurdity of human existence, the incongruity between human beings who demand meaning and purpose and a world that offers none.[5] Camus accuses Kierkegaard of embracing "the leap" because of an inability to face this absurd universe. Camus himself wants to live life "without appeal," courageously recognizing the absurdity of existence, but continuing stubbornly to struggle and revolt, like his absurd hero Sisyphus, endlessly pushing his rock up the mountain only to see it return to the bottom after every struggle to reach the heights.

It is noteworthy that this irrationalist reading of Kierkegaard does not only come from his enemies. Some of his friends are only too happy to see Kierkegaard as someone who gives overrated reason an energetic spanking. Such a perspective is understandable. After all, if Camus is right and the universe is absurd, what is so wrong about taking an irrational leap of faith? However, it is a mistake to criticize or praise Kierkegaard for saying things he does not say. The crucial point is that Camus fundamentally misconstrues what Kierkegaard is all about. The French existentialist does not understand the nature of Kierkegaard's leap nor its motivation. For Kierkegaard, as I shall try to show in detail in this volume, the leap is not a dishonest evasion of the human condition, but stems from a courageous attempt to face the truth about who we are and who we should be.

In more academic circles Kierkegaard's reputation as an irrationalist is hardly less prominent. Generations of philosophers have been educated to see Kierkegaard as the archetypal "fideist" who rejects reason on behalf of faith. The theologians have been a bit more lenient, but even so, many have seen Kierkegaard only as the inspiration for the "dialectical theology" of Barth and Brunner. For critics of Barth and Brunner, this will hardly seem a virtue, but even their friends will know that Barth himself, perhaps concerned about Kierkegaard's apparent fideism, increasingly distanced himself from Kierkegaard as he worked on his massive *Church Dogmatics*.

What are the specifics in the bill of indictment that charges Kierkegaard with being an irrationalist? Since reason is both theoretical and practical, there are two spheres in which irrationalism can manifest itself; Kierkegaard has been criticized both in his account of beliefs, particularly religious beliefs, and in his account of choice, particularly ethical choice. As we shall see, the two types of criticism are linked, because for Kierkegaard our ethical choices cannot be divorced from our relationship with God. The essays in this volume represent a sustained attempt to rebut both kinds of accusations and to show that Kierkegaard is not really an enemy of rationality.

But is such an endeavor worthwhile? Will a Kierkegaard who is not an enemy of reason be a sanitized Kierkegaard, a Kierkegaard who no longer interests us? To the contrary, I am convinced that removing the misconceptions allows Kierkegaard's authentic voice to disturb us in helpful, if sometimes painful, ways. Instead of pigeonholing him as an irrational fideist whom we may ignore, we are forced to listen to what he actually has to say about ourselves and the modern world.

When we hear those real messages, there is little chance that Kierkegaard will not interest us as well as trouble us. The last thing I would want to do is present a Kierkegaard who is missing his polemical edges. Kierkegaard is a

sharp critic of rationalism, and he forcefully reminds us of the limitations of human reason. Hence my task is really twofold. At the same time that I dispel the myths about Kierkegaard the irrationalist, I must clear the way to hear the Kierkegaard who demands that we reject the view that human reason is a timeless godlike faculty. Instead of talking about Reason, we need to focus on the actual reasoning of historically situated, subjectively conditioned, finite human beings.

There is no contradiction between arguing that Kierkegaard is not an enemy of reason while at the same time trying to present Kierkegaard as a critic of what we humans call "Reason," where this abstraction stands for our human efforts to pretend that we have a godlike "view from nowhere." It is not irrational for human beings to recognize that human reason is finite and thus is limited in various ways. The Kierkegaard we need to hear is a Kierkegaard who has a keen eye for those limits and also for the way we humans want to hide them.

The essays in this volume fall into four sections. The first group of essays has the goal of displaying the value of taking Kierkegaard seriously as a thinker. Although Kierkegaard was anything but an academic philosopher, and though his interests were not primarily theoretical in nature, he did have a wonderfully supple mind with many philosophical virtues. In the course of his attempt to help his contemporaries understand what it means to be a Christian, he engaged many important philosophical issues and interacted with many of the greatest Western philosophers, both from ancient and modern times. Despite this, Kierkegaard is often not taken seriously as a philosopher. The situation is aptly captured by a comment from a distinguished philosopher whom I count as a friend, who said on one occasion that as a teenager, he too "went through a Kierkegaard phase." This view depicts Kierkegaard as big on adolescent angst, rich in images and powerful poetic descriptions, but not a serious thinker.

In a way this book as a whole is an attempt to show how rewarding it is to engage Kierkegaard as a serious philosopher, perhaps the greatest Christian thinker since the Middle Ages. But the essays in the first section of the book are particularly apt for displaying the way Kierkegaard does his philosophical work. They show Kierkegaard thinking about a variety of philosophical problems in some of the core areas of philosophy and utilizing an array of philosophical methods.

"Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*" plunges into one of the most heated and vital philosophical debates of our time, the debate about the nature of truth. Is truth "objective," somehow independent of us human beings, as realists claim, or is

truth somehow a product of human thinking, as the "antirealists" say? Surprisingly, I argue that despite the well-known Kierkegaadian thesis that "truth is subjectivity," Kierkegaard is uncompromisingly on the side of realism. The claim that truth is subjectivity pertains to what makes it possible for a person to *live* truly. Merely having objectively true beliefs does not make a person's life true, but so far from denying the existence of such objective truth, Kierkegaard expressly affirms its reality.

All of this is linked to a becoming modesty about the powers of human reason. We humans cannot produce "the final system." Our beliefs, at least about the most important things, are approximations of the final truth, and as unfinished beings, our beliefs are subject to revision. However, it is important that reality is a system for God, and thus there is an ideal truth for us to approximate. The world actually is the way God sees it, though we must never lose sight of the fact that we are not God.

For Kierkegaard, epistemological modesty does not lead to skepticism about objective truth. He rejects a crucial assumption, made both by dogmatic realists and antirealists: that if there is objective truth, there must be an objective method that guarantees us access to that truth. The dogmatist affirms there is truth and so there must be such a method; the antirealist says there is no such method and so we must say good-bye to objective truth. Kierkegaard affirms that there is truth but we humans have no risk-free access to that truth. We cannot find the truth that really matters by following the siren song of "pure reason," but by becoming the kinds of human beings who are capable of grasping and living in the truth.

The next essay, "Kant and Kierkegaard on the Possibility of Metaphysics," looks at the implications of this kind of epistemological stance for metaphysics, developing an account of Kierkegaard's attitudes on this subject in dialogue with Immanuel Kant. Both thinkers are usually regarded as critics of metaphysics, and under the onslaught of such criticism the word has taken on negative associations for many. I begin with a careful look at the varied senses of "metaphysics" and agree that for many of these senses Kierkegaard is an opponent of metaphysics. However, if we think of metaphysics, following William James, as an attempt to clarify a person's deepest beliefs about what is real, those beliefs that both stem from and shape a person's actual life-choices, Kierkegaard and Kant must be understood to be doing metaphysics. Kierkegaard is opposed to speculation that presumes to be disinterested, but vigorously defends the importance of what he calls "subjective reflection," which does not mean thinking that is biased and undisciplined by a concern for truth, but rather reflection that is focused on questions about who I am and should be.

Such questions cannot be divorced from my convictions about God, nor should they be. Kierkegaard does not think that the question of God can be a purely speculative question; it cannot be divorced from the question of how I relate to God. Surprisingly, Camus's picture of Kierkegaard turning to God in a desperate leap of faith when reason has shown God does not exist turns out to be completely false. Kierkegaard thinks that human beings can know God's reality, and in fact the reason no rational proof of God's reality is necessary is because God can become *present* to human beings. This is only possible, however, when humans are spiritually and inwardly developed. Thus, the discovery of metaphysical truth cannot be divorced from the process of personal transformation.

A crucial issue if Kierkegaard is to be taken seriously as a philosopher, as I have done in looking at his views in epistemology and metaphysics, concerns the role of irony in his writings. Some critics have charged that to take Kierkegaard seriously as a philosopher who provides claims and arguments of various sorts is fundamentally to misunderstand the literary character of his work, which is pervaded by irony. In the thrid essay, "The Role of Irony in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*," I look at how irony functions in this key book of Kierkegaard's as a test case to discern the place of irony in the authorship as a whole.

The critics are quite right to see that irony is a crucial dimension of Kierkegaard's thought. His own dissertation was on *The Concept of Irony* and he clearly relished the use of irony, both as a pervasive feature of many of his works and in many individual asides and flourishes. I argue, however, that paying attention to the ironical character of Kierkegaard's works does not evacuate them of their philosophical character. Kierkegaard himself makes two important distinctions in his own discussion of irony. The first is a distinction between "common" and "rare" irony. The more common type of irony, he says, is irony in which something that is a jest is said as if it were meant seriously. The rarer type of irony, the type he himself exemplifies, is when an author says something serious but does so in the form of a jest. In such a case the ironical form does not abolish the serious content but actually presupposes it. The irony of the work sets a riddle and a challenge for the reader: can the reader see through the jesting form to grasp the serious point?

When *Philosophical Fragments* is read in this light, the ironical form is apparent. Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author, pretends to "invent" as a thought experiment something that suspiciously resembles Christianity. The content of his thought experiment (as well as Christianity), however, is supposed to be something that no human being could have invented but that only could have been revealed by God. The irony is trans-

parent, since Climacus is inventing something that on his account cannot be invented. However, the irony does not undermine but presupposes the claim that Christianity is a revealed faith that could not have been the product of human reason.

The second important distinction Kierkegaard makes is between what he calls "controlled" or "mastered" irony and irony that turns into "absolute, infinite negativity." I try to show that this distinction in Kierkegaard corresponds to one that Wayne Booth draws between "stable" and "unstable" irony. Unstable irony is irony which leaves the reader no place to stand. When the speaker's apparent meaning ironically unravels, no serious purpose emerges as the real point. Rather, every attempt to reach some stable meaning gets undermined in turn, and the reader is left with nothing at all. This unstable irony is surely close to the Romantic ironists whom Kierkegaard criticizes for their infinite negativity. It is true that existing human beings are never finished, and therefore there is always room for the negativity that undermines the status quo and pushes us onward. But the existing individual must have a place to stand in order to go forward. Kierkegaard's own irony is irony in the service of a commitment to his ethical and Christian ideals. It is what Booth calls stable irony, irony in the service of a moral and religious viewpoint. His purpose cannot be to leave the reader in what Kierkegaard himself often calls the "vortex" of modern thought.

It is natural to move from a look at the irony that pervades Kierkegaard's work to the humor that is equally evident in it. I would in fact defend the claim that no other philosopher in the West is so funny a writer as Kierkegaard.[6] Not even Nietzsche's sharp wit can compare with the humor that Kierkegaard displays in most of his work. But Kierkegaard not only uses humor; he thinks about its nature and its role in human life. This is a profoundly important philosophical topic, though it is one to which most philosophers have paid scant attention.

"Kierkegaard's View of Humor: Must Christians Always Be Solemn?" looks at Kierkegaard's account of humor and tries to make sense of his puzzling claim that there is an essential connection between humor and the religious life. Contrary to the stereotype of the religious person as dour and somber, Kierkegaard thinks that the highest and deepest kind of humor requires a life view that is at least in the neighborhood of a religious perspective. Humor is made possible by certain deep truths about the human condition, and a recognition of those truths turns out to be one of the essential components of the religious life.

Humor in general for Kierkegaard revolves around the recognition of what he calls a "contradiction," something that we would probably term an

incongruity. (It is worth paying attention to Kierkegaard's linguistic usage here, because his understanding of the incarnation also involves seeing it as containing a "contradiction.") The contradiction must be one that is experienced as "painless" because the humorist sees this discrepancy from a "higher perspective" that gives the individual a "way out." Even trivial forms of humor can be understood in this way. For example, there is a contradiction between the downward ascent in the pratfall of a physical comedian and that comedian's upward gaze prior to the fall (Kierkegaard's own example).

Not all humor is as silly as a pratfall. The kind of humor that strikes us as deep humor does so because it reminds us of or even illuminates the deep incongruity that lies at the base of our own nature. Every honest human being experiences a "contradiction" between the ideal self and the actual self. The people whom we regard as the greatest saints are precisely those who do not view their own accomplishments all that seriously because they are keenly conscious of how far short of their ideals they fall. The guilt we feel when we perceive this moral gap constitutes the ground of the religious life according to Kierkegaard.

Of course religiousness requires more than guilt; it involves the discovery of an apparent way out of the problem, a higher standpoint that allows us to accept ourselves again, and smile at the goodness of life. We can thus see why Kierkegaard sees the life of the person he calls "the humorist" as someone who lies at the boundary of authentic religious existence, and why he says that humor will be the "outer costume" of the truly religious individual. An examination of Kierkegaard's view of humor not only illuminates that subject, but helps us understand his famous theory of the "three spheres of existence" or "stages on life's way." We can better understand what he means by his typology of aesthetic, ethical, and religious existence if we see humor as both a pervasive feature of human existence and a special "boundary zone" that lies between the ethical and the religious spheres.

Chapter 6 concludes this examination of Kierkegaard as a philosopher by looking at some of his thinking on a fundamental question of religious language. A good part of philosophy of religion in the twentieth century was devoted to discussions of religious language, and what it means to use such language. In "Misusing Religious Language: Something about Kierkegaard and *The Myth of God Incarnate*," I look at what was for Kierkegaard a crucial issue: the nature of the incarnation and how our language about the incarnation functions. In the next chapter I give a sustained treatment of what Kierkegaard means by calling the incarnation the "Absolute Paradox," and why he thinks that this paradox always presents human reason with "the possibility of offense." In this chapter I deal with

the more restricted issue of how the language of the incarnation functions for the believing community.

Many contemporary theologians have proposed that the traditional understanding of Jesus as the Son of God, the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, is no longer tenable. The authors of *The Myth of God Incarnate* here serve to illustrate a tendency that continues to be widespread: to reject any belief that Jesus was metaphysically God and instead see the traditional Christian doctrine as a myth that needs to be reinterpreted or translated for the modern world. It is at this point that I find Kierkegaard's treatment of the concept of the incarnation relevant to the contemporary debate.

Kierkegaard saw the Hegelians in his day as treating the incarnation as a myth. As he saw it, the Hegelians viewed the story of Jesus as one that embodies the truth that the divine expresses itself most fully in human life. Of course for the Hegelians, Spirit understood as divine is expressed most adequately in the state and in the activities of "Absolute Spirit"—art, religion, and philosophy. The biblical story of Jesus is one where a particular human first comes to be aware of the divine as something immanent in human consciousness. As Kierkegaard sees things, the Hegelian account cannot be right. For even if we take the incarnation merely as a fictional story, the meaning of the story cannot be that we humans have godlike potential, and that ultimately each of us has the divine within. Rather, the point of the story is that we humans lack the truth, and that we need a divine Teacher who not only brings us the truth, but transforms us into the kinds of beings who are capable of receiving the truth. In effect, he accuses the Hegelians of being bad readers of the story. Another way of putting his criticism is as follows: Hegel essentially accepts the Platonic standpoint which posits that we humans have the truth within us. That standpoint may be the true one, but it cannot be true that this standpoint is Christian, as Hegel maintains.

Contemporary theologians who wish to interpret the incarnation as a myth are in the same position. Even if they are right in their metaphysical views, they cannot be right in maintaining that the views they are putting forward are truly Christian. For they are misusing religious language: using concepts and metaphors to advance a position that those concepts and metaphors were expressly designed to exclude.

Having seen that it is indeed fruitful to take Kierkegaard seriously as a philosopher, the second group of essays takes dead aim at the charge that Kierkegaard was an irrationalist by examining his views on faith, reason, and the central Christian claim: that Jesus was God in human form. The essays in this section make a case that Kierkegaard is best understood not as

an opponent of reason, but as a critic of Enlightenment conceptions of reason. As such he can be fruitfully compared to the "Reformed Epistemologists" who have criticized "evidentialism" and developed an account of religious faith that sees it as something that is "epistemologically basic" and not dependent on evidence or arguments. The Reformed Epistemologists, such as William Alston, Alvin Plantinga, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, have argued that such a stance is not irrational or contrary to reason; and if their arguments are convincing, then there may be a way of understanding Kierkegaard that similarly absolves him of the charge of misology.

"Is Kierkegaard An Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox, and Faith" is the essay that most directly takes on the primary task of the book. One of the most well-known parts of Kierkegaard's authorship is his treatment of the incarnation as the "Absolute Paradox" (by Johannes Climacus) or "the sign of contradiction" (by Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity*). Many commentators have interpreted Kierkegaard to mean that to believe in the incarnation is to believe what is logically contradictory and thus contrary to reason. Christian faith then involves a crucifixion of the intellect, a heroic attempt to believe what is logically impossible.

I argue, however, that this interpretation is plainly wrong. Though there are passages that could be read as suggesting this is Kierkegaard's view, there are decisive arguments, both textual and drawn from the overall structure of Kierkegaard's thought, to show that this cannot be his meaning.

I begin by showing that Kierkegaard does not usually employ the word "contradiction" to refer to a formal, logical contradiction but rather to some kind of tension-filled incongruity. For example, human existence in general is said to include a "contradiction." There are several passages where Kierkegaard distinguishes between a formal, logical contradiction and the kind of contradiction that characterizes the incarnation. Furthermore, to know that the idea of the "God-man" was a logical contradiction, we would need to have a kind of clarity about the nature of God and the nature of human beings that Kierkegaard says we lack. We know that a "square-circle" is a contradictory concept because we understand what a square is and what a circle is, but Kierkegaard thinks we do not understand either ourselves or God. Finally, thinking of the incarnation as a formal contradiction would destroy one of its most crucial characteristics, according to Kierkegaard: its uniqueness. There is nothing unique about the notion of a logical contradiction.

It is true that for Kierkegaard the incarnation is incomprehensible to human reason, and thus may truly be said to be *above* reason. We do not understand how God could become a human being, and when we try to do

so, the event may *appear* to us to be a contradiction. However, when we recognize the limits of our reason, which we do when we relate to God in faith and recognize that God is God and we are not, then we can understand that it is to be expected that we will fail to understand God. It is not irrational for reason to come to understand and accept the limits of reason.

Why then is there a tension between reason and faith? For Kierkegaard the tension arises because of human sinfulness. Because of our sin we pridefully think that whatever we cannot understand can be dismissed as absurd. The proper response of Christianity to the charge that we cannot understand the incarnation is to point out that this is simply an echo of Christian teachings, rather than an objection to them. Christianity itself maintains that sinful humans will necessarily see the incarnation as absurd. The alternative to faith is not a neutral reason that dispassionately is guided by evidence but an offended reason that rejects faith out of pride and selfishness.

The relation of faith to reason in Kierkegaard is further illuminated in the essay "Apologetical Arguments in *Philosophical Fragments*." There is a paradox attached to Kierkegaard and the idea of a defense of the Christian faith. On the one hand, Kierkegaard is well known as a critic of such arguments, going so far as to say that the person who invented the idea of proving God's existence is "Judas Iscariot Number Two." On the other hand, Kierkegaard himself seems to give arguments for Christianity in a number of places. Furthermore, a large number of readers find that after an encounter with Kierkegaard, Christianity makes sense to them in a way that it did not previously. Both of these elements are present in *Philosophical Fragments*, which rejects the idea of basing Christianity on arguments, but which also gives several arguments that seem to support Christian faith. To many readers the book as a whole appears to constitute one sustained argument that it is reasonable to believe in a Christianity that transcends human reason.

I try to resolve this tension by distinguishing different kinds of apologetic arguments. If we mean by "apologetics" arguments that are supposed to begin with evidence that is accessible to anyone and arguments that make the truth of Christianity evident to everyone, Kierkegaard thinks there are no such arguments. Furthermore, the attempts to construct such arguments backfire because trying to make Christianity acceptable to the unbeliever tempts the arguer to falsify the character of Christianity to make it more palatable.

Kierkegaard rejects apologetic arguments in this sense because they are attempts to make faith superfluous. They presuppose the kind of epistemology associated with "classical foundationalism," in which knowledge and belief must be rooted in a body of propositions known objectively and with certainty. The rejection of this kind of apologetics, however, does not require

the rejection of all kinds. Arguments that do not replace or supplant faith and which preserve the character of genuine Christianity, thereby leaving "the possibility of offense," would be a different matter entirely. An argument that appeals to evidence that requires faith to discern or accept, and which preserves the possibility of offense would then be consistent with Kierkegaard's intentions. I try to show that such arguments may have great value if we reject classical foundationalist epistemology, as many contemporary philosophers have done, and move towards a view of knowledge that recognizes the role subjective qualities play in grasping truth. Faith may be understood as a kind of skill that enables us to see things that would otherwise be missed.

Chapter 9 carries forward this concern with apologetic arguments by examining "The Relevance of Historical Evidence for Christian Faith: A Critique of a Kierkegaardian View." Consistent with his depreciation of apologetics, Kierkegaard consistently pours scorn on attempts to give historical arguments for the truth of Christian faith. Kierkegaard does not believe that whether or not a person should or will become a Christian might hinge on the role of some scholarly debate about, for example, the historicity of Luke's gospel. Such scholarly debates never end and can never be resolved with the kind of certainty required by a decision to stake one's eternal destiny on a belief in Jesus.

I argue that Kierkegaard is right to maintain that no amount of historical evidence is sufficient to produce faith in an individual, and also right to maintain that no particular amount is necessary for faith. Faith is the work of God, produced in the individual when God encounters that individual in the person of Christ. It is not the outcome of some scholarly debate. I argue, however, that it is not legitimate to infer from these justifiable claims that historical evidence is simply irrelevant for faith, something that Kierkegaard appears to imply. Insofar as faith has historical content, and for Kierkegaard it does, it is vulnerable to claims that it can be historically disproved. The believer could not be indifferent if it were really shown by irrefutable evidence (as it has not been and could not be) that Jesus never existed or never did or said the kinds of things attributed to him in the gospels. Furthermore, though God is the author of faith, there is no reason that God could not use historical evidence as one means whereby faith is produced in the individual. This does not make faith hostage to some endless scholarly debate so long as we recognize why faith is itself one of the factors that help us to understand and appreciate the historical evidence.

Chapters 10 and 11 attempt to put these reflections on Kierkegaard's view of faith and reason into the context of the contemporary movement

known as Reformed Epistemology. "Kierkegaard and Plantinga on Belief in God: Subjectivity as the Ground of Properly Basic Religious Beliefs" compares Kierkegaard's thinking about belief in God with Alvin Plantinga's attempt to argue that "the correct or proper way to believe in God . . . is to take belief in God as basic." Although Kierkegaard is well known for his claims that faith in *Christ* requires a "leap" and for his attacks on arguments for God's existence, he does not think, contrary to readers such as Camus, that belief in *God* requires a leap. It is only faith in the incarnation, belief in the God in time, that requires the leap. The reason why proofs of God's existence are a bad idea is not that we cannot know God's existence, but just the reverse. Attempting to prove God's existence makes it appear that something that should be certain, if the individual is properly spiritually developed, is in reality doubtful.

With respect to belief in God, then, it makes sense to see Kierkegaard as holding to a "non-evidentialist" view that is similar to Plantinga. Belief in God can and should be properly basic, rather than something that is derived from arguments or proofs. Plantinga himself says that such beliefs are not necessarily arbitrary or irrational. Some of our beliefs must be basic in this way if they are not the product of an infinite series of arguments. If we reject classical foundationalism, which holds that only beliefs that are self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses should be basic, then the possibility of holding to belief in God in this way is open to us.

Plantinga himself stresses that though belief in God is not based on evidence, it does have grounds. Belief in God is grounded in such experiences as perceiving an act I have done as one that requires forgiveness, or seeing a flower as beautiful, or a mountain as sublime and spontaneously being moved to think of the greatness of God. It is at this point, I argue, that Kierkegaard has something to offer Plantinga. These experiences that ground belief in God are experiences that require a certain receptivity; our capacity for them cannot be divorced from the kind of people we are. Kierkegaard's stress on subjectivity can be seen as attention to the subjective aspects of these grounding conditions.

The final essay in this section, "Externalist Epistemology, Subjectivity, and Christian Knowledge: Plantinga and Kierkegaard," moves on from the consideration of mere belief in God to the question of how a Christian believer comes to grasp the distinctive doctrines of Christianity as true. To understand the accounts offered by Plantinga and Kierkegaard we must understand what is usually termed "externalist epistemology." The *externalist* in epistemology puts forward a type of however, "modest" epistemology that abandons the idea that epistemology is a foundational discipline that will

somehow offer a certificate of authenticity for dubious knowledge claims. Instead, the externalist says that a theory of knowledge must begin by assuming we have some examples of knowledge and trying to learn from those examples.

Rather than viewing knowledge as something that we must be able to certify by reflection on our own internal states of mind, the externalist thinks that knowledge is a matter of being properly related to external reality. We have knowledge not when we hold true beliefs by mere accident, but when those true beliefs in some way stem from an ability to "track" with reality. When our true beliefs are the result of reliable belief-forming mechanisms or are the product of faculties whose purpose is to help us reach truth and which are functioning properly in the right kind of environment, then such beliefs amount to knowledge.

We may not have any guarantees or proof that our senses are reliable or that we are not victims of a Cartesian evil demon or that we have not been kidnapped by alien scientists who are electrically stimulating our brains to produce the illusion that we are having the experiences we seem to be having. For the externalist, if any such conditions prevail, then we are in trouble and will fail to have knowledge. When we are rightly related to reality, however, knowledge happens, and our inability to prove that we are in such a relation does not invalidate that knowledge.

This kind of epistemology is explicitly embraced by Plantinga, but I argue that it provides an illuminating way of understanding Kierkegaard's nonevidentialist account of Christian faith as well. The distinctiveness of Kierkegaard's account comes through in his stress on the role that subjectivity (or "the passions") plays in helping us become the kinds of persons who can be rightly related to the reality of God. Such an account has little value for evidentialist apologetics, but it has great value for the reflective believer who wishes to understand her faith, and who can thereby come to see how a faith that is not the result of "reasons" is nevertheless not irrational.

Part 4 of this volume goes on to examine the charge that Kierkegaard is a practical irrationalist, someone who rejects the role of reason in our ethical lives. Kierkegaard's reputation as an immoralist who claims faith could justify an evil act is probably rooted in *Fear and Trembling*, a pseudonymous treatment of the "binding of Isaac" story from Genesis 22, in which Abraham is tested by God by being asked to sacrifice his son. Philosophers such as Brand Blanshard have claimed that Kierkegaard's treatment of this story shows that Kierkegaard is a "moral nihilist" whose views imply that our "clearest and surest judgments about values are worthless and it is no longer possible to hold that anything is really better than anything else."[7]

In "Faith as the *Telos* of Morality: A Reading of *Fear and Trembling*," I try to respond to Blanshard. *Fear and Trembling* does present the life of faith as contrasting with a life that is rooted in the ethical, but critics such as Blanshard do not recognize that the term "ethical" is here being used in a special way. In *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio, the pseudonymous author, thinks of the ethical in a Hegelian way, as those approved patterns of conduct that are embedded in human social practices and institutions. The ethical in the book refers to the Hegelian concept of *Sittlichkeit*, a social ethic that is embodied in the laws and customs of a people. In arguing that faith is not reducible to ethics, and may even require that one go against ethics, Silentio is holding out for the possibility that God may require a person to go against what his or her culture demands.

There are of course other conceptions of the ethical, and in other works Kierkegaard himself does not use "the ethical" in this limited way. Thus, the possibility opens of rethinking the nature of ethics in such a way that the ethical is itself grounded in God; faith would then ground ethics rather than being opposed to it.[8] Such an ethic may appear "absurd," but not to reason in general—only to that form of human thinking that is opposed to faith. To the person of faith, a relation to God may give rise to obligations, just as any other relation might. If God asks me to do something, and my trust in God's goodness is great enough, I may be convinced that it is right and good to obey God. Attention to such Kierkegaardian works as *Practice in Christianity* and *Works of Love* gives us a picture of the ethical life that differs drastically from the caricature presented by Blanshard.

The next essay, "A Kierkegaardian View of the Foundations of Morality," begins to develop the broader Kierkegaardian picture of the ethical life. The essay begins with a look at the difference between two types of Christian ethical theories: It distinguishes "human-nature" theories, which see morality as rooted in the human nature God gives in creation, and "divine-command" theories, which ground ethics in the authoritative commands God gives his creatures. Though these views are often seen as rivals, in this essay I argue that the two types of theories are much closer than many imagine, because God's commands may be seen as fitting the nature he has given us, and the fulfillment of the nature God has given us may require a relation to God that depends on obedience to divine commands.

Kierkegaard offers, I argue, a kind of divine-command theory of moral obligation that unites the virtues of both types of theory. God's fundamental command is to become the self God created us to be; thus moral obligations are indeed shaped by our created nature. Our nature, however, is such that we cannot fully be ourselves without a relation to God, a relation that

requires obedience to divine commands as a grateful response to the goodness a loving God has lavished upon us. Yet God's commands cannot simply be deduced from a general knowledge of human nature, because God had created us as unique individuals. To become our true selves we must be willing to respond to God's unique commands to us as individuals.

The kind of ethic Kierkegaard himself defends is thus one that sees obligations as grounded in the commands of a loving God. It presents the ethical life as grounded in a higher authority, but the whole notion of authority is problematic to many modern moral theorists, who see autonomy as the essence of the moral life. "Kierkegaard on Religious Authority: The Problem of the Criterion" shows the fundamental importance of authority for Kierkegaard, not least in the ethical life, and defends authority as an indispensable concept, even while acknowledging the epistemological dilemmas authority presents to us. In contrast to dominant modes of thought in both modern and postmodern philosophy, Kierkegaard considers the religious authority inherent in a special revelation from God to be the fundamental source of religious truth.

The question as to how a genuine religious authority could be recognized is particularly difficult for Kierkegaard. He rightly recognizes that if I accept an authority only when I can independently give reasons for believing that authority, then I do not really accept the authority as an authority. Rather, I have subordinated the presumed authority to the authority of my own reason. Nevertheless, there are many rival candidates for religious authority; at least some must be spurious, and so criteria for a genuine authority are needed.

Kierkegaard does offer some criteria that he thinks are helpful, at least in ruling out some imposters, though he says no criteria can give us any guarantees about such matters. The criteria he cites for the most part focus on the prophet or apostle who is the bearer of the alleged revelation. A true prophet, says Kierkegaard, will appeal to authority and not try to make a philosophical or aesthetic case for the truth or profundity of his or her message. The Apostle Paul should be believed because he has apostolic authority, not because he is a clever logician or excellent tentmaker. A second criterion is that the true prophet will reject any appeal to force or power, relying on the providence of God and accepting the fact that people may not listen. Suffering or even martyrdom may be the fate of the prophet, and the genuine prophet can accept this outcome. An alleged prophet who uses power politics or manipulates people is thereby disqualified. A third criterion is that a genuine revelation would contain something paradoxical, something that human reason could not have discovered on its own.

All these criteria are helpful and in fact are employed by other theologians. Nevertheless, I argue that Kierkegaard's reasons for rejecting another traditional criterion, namely that a genuine revelation would be accompanied by miracles, are unjustified. Kierkegaard is worried that an appeal to miracles would make faith unnecessary, but, as he himself says, faith may be required even to discern and believe in the miracle. A miracle could function as a sign that a message really comes from God, and this is something that a faithful person would want to know. However ready a person may be to believe what God says, he or she needs good reasons to believe that the message truly does come from God. Miracles, like the other criteria Kierkegaard does offer, would not amount to a proof, but miracles could function as signs that help the person of faith recognize that it is indeed God who is speaking. In conclusion I try to show that the criteria offered by Kierkegaard as well as the method by which they are derived require us to question certain Enlightenment views as to what should count as rational. Once more we are pointed away from Enlightenment epistemologies, with their demand for certainty, and towards an epistemic stance that accepts our finitude and recognizes that we begin our epistemic lives with commitments that cannot be given incorrigible foundations.

Part 5 of the book again shifts focus slightly to examine some of Kierkegaard's reflections on the human person. Philosophical psychology is implicit in many of the earlier essays in the book, because Kierkegaard's reflections on faith and reason, as well as those that deal with the ethical life, always are carried on with an understanding that these are human activities that reflect the nature and character of existing human beings. It is fitting then to conclude with a group of papers that highlight Kierkegaard's understanding of the human self.

The first essay in this section, "Who is the Other in *The Sickness unto Death*? God and Human Relations in the Constitution of the Self" asks whether the textbook caricature of Kierkegaard as a radical individualist who did not grasp the importance of relationships is correct. I argue that Kierkegaard does understand that the self is fundamentally social in nature; we only become a self through a relation with other selves. For Kierkegaard, a self is both something that a human being is and something a human being must become. We are created by God as selves; to that degree our selfhood is an ontological fact. However, God extends us freedom and thereby makes it possible for us to participate in our own becoming. God creates us with possibilities whose actualization depends on us, and therefore our task as human beings is to "become what we are," to realize the possibilities that God has

granted us to become fully personal, a task we could not undertake if we were not already selves of a sort.

In *The Sickness unto Death,* the pseudonymous author Anti-Climacus says that human beings are fundamentally relational: a human self "relates itself to itself by relating itself to another" (13–14). This other provides a criterion of identity, an ideal of selfhood by which we measure ourselves.

Many commentators have thought that this other is God and therefore that Kierkegaard's concept of selfhood still does not do justice to human relations in the formation of the self. A close reading of part 1 of *The Sickness unto Death*, however, shows that Kierkegaard is all too aware of the power human relations have for selfhood. The question is not whether we are formed by relations to other humans, but whether our identity is wholly constituted by such relations. God is the ontological foundation of selfhood and is the Other we must know to become our true selves fully, but God has given humans the freedom to ground their selves in what is less than God. Kierkegaard argues that it is possible for the self to be more than an ensemble of social relations, to become "the individual." However, even this individuality is made possible through a relationship—one to God, whose call to me is to become the self God created me to be.

Chapter 16 continues this exploration of human selfhood by looking at Kierkegaard as a depth psychologist. Though the ideal for Kierkegaard is transparency, much of the self is opaque to itself. We have great powers to deceive ourselves and suppress the truth about ourselves. "Kierkegaard's View of the Unconscious" attempts to clarify Kierkegaard's understanding of this aspect of selfhood.

Kierkegaard's account of the unconscious is marked by its Christian character, as he sees the human attempt to hide from ourselves as a manifestation of human sinfulness, and gives this diagnosis with a view towards a Christian "therapy" that points us towards human wholeness. As such, the Kierkegaardian account might appear less scientific than its Freudian rivals. However, I argue that no account of the "dynamic unconscious" will be free of moral and religious assumptions; as soon as we say what "human health" and "pathology" are we have left the realm of value-free objectivity behind. Thus Kierkegaard's view should be considered in the marketplace of ideas along with its secular rivals.

The essay begins with a consideration of the tensions that inhere in the Freudian view of the unconscious. At times Freud views the unconscious as something that is rooted in our biology and that we have little control over. We are lived by the Id, literally "the It." However, the unconscious is also dynamic, something we have some responsibility for. We repress aspects of

the self, and this repression reflects the relationships we have, particularly relationships with parents, who give us our initial sense of identity.

What is called "object-relations theory" develops this second aspect of Freudian thought. Object-relations theory sees our sense of self as rooted in our early relationship with a caregiving parent; we identify with this parent and internalize his or her ideals. Those who experience "good-enough mothering" are relatively healthy, but all of us, according to theorists such as Harry Guntrip, have some degree of "splitting" or dissociation, the result of disowning the part of us derived from "the bad parent."

Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious is closely related to object-relations theory. Like this view, he holds that our sense of self is grounded in a relation to others, and that various forms of pathology result when those relations are poor or when our sense of self is derived from relations to something that cannot bear the weight of the self's identity. Insofar as I am unwilling to be myself I find myself deceiving myself over myself; the self becomes opaque to itself.

Kierkegaard sees the developmental task as one that applies to human life as a whole, not merely to early childhood or even to adolescence. In a way, the object-relations theorist agrees. Guntrip thinks that a good therapist can provide the unconditional love and acceptance that can heal the effects of inadequate parenting. Kierkegaard, however, thinks that no human being can do this job; a secure identity that allows us to become fully transparent to ourselves requires a relation to the God who loves us unconditionally and offers us grace and forgiveness. Therapists may certainly be helpful to many people, but a therapist who sees me for an hour a week and does so for remuneration can hardly substitute for the God who was willing to suffer and die for me.

Kierkegaard's reflections on the self were certainly influential on the existentialist philosophers of the twentieth century, who emphasized the idea that human beings form themselves through their choices. It is therefore not too surprising that some have read the existentialist notion of "radical choice" back into Kierkegaard himself. The final two essays in part 5 examine Kierkegaard's understanding of the place of the will in human existence.

"Does Kierkegaard Think Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?" looks at the role of the will in the development of religious faith in the individual. Kierkegaard is well known for his discussion of faith as requiring a leap. What is this leap and how do we make it? Philosophers such as Louis Pojman have thought that Kierkegaard held that beliefs were under our direct, voluntary control. Religious faith is simply something that must be chosen on this view. It is a difficult choice because it requires beliefs in a paradox that human reason cannot comprehend. Pojman thinks that this "direct volitionalism" is

psychologically mistaken. We have no power directly to decide what to believe. And he argues that we should form our beliefs only on the basis of rational evidence; choosing to believe for any other reason is wrong.

I argue that Kierkegaard is not a direct volitionalist at all. He is fully aware of the fact that our beliefs are often not under our control. It is just for this reason that he claims that the universal doubt that modern philosophy pretends to begin with is impossible. Sometimes it is hard or even impossible to doubt; sometimes it is hard or even impossible to believe. However, when we are dealing with beliefs about existence or what David Hume would call "matters of fact," there is always a logical gap between evidence and belief. It is this gap that makes skepticism possible, however difficult it may be. On Kierkegaard's view, the skeptic is ultimately a skeptic because he or she wills to be a skeptic. This implies that those of us who are not skeptics are not skeptics because we do not want to be skeptics. In general, anyone who looks at human beliefs cannot help but recognize the massive role played by our desires, hopes, and fears in their formation. Think for example of the contradictory beliefs about who won a political debate formed by observers of the debate, most of whom usually firmly believe that the candidate they want to win actually won the debate. It is not surprising, then, that even though faith cannot simply be willed into existence, whether a person attains faith or not reflects their deepest desires and commitments. We must choose to give up our resistance to God and allow God to create faith within us if we are to become believers.

The concluding essay in this section, "Where There's a Will There's a Way: Kierkegaard's Theory of Action," tries to give a general account of Kierkegaard's understanding of the will and its role in human action. The essay begins with a critique of Alasdair MacIntyre's popular picture of Kierkegaard as a proponent of "radical choice," a fundamental life choice which must be made without reasons. MacIntyre's reading of *Either/Or* rests on a faulty picture of the book. It is true that no external result is given for the argument between the aesthete who loves seduction and the older married ethicist, Judge William, who urges the young aesthete to choose responsibly. However, the arguments of the ethicist by no means presuppose an ethical point of view. Rather, Judge William gives good reasons why the ethical life is superior to the aesthetic life even when judged on aesthetic grounds. The choice of the ethical is hardly a radical "criterionless choice," made for no reason.

Kierkegaard's understanding of human action is best understood as standing in the tradition of Aristotle, which views an action as the result of a choice that is itself the outcome of deliberation. In this Aristotelian picture

human action begins with something like a desire or a wish, which in the paradigm case leads to deliberation about how to bring about the desired end, culminating in a choice. Kierkegaard accepts this general picture of things but insists that the will is not necessarily completely determined by this process of reflection. A person can know what is right or good but not do it. If we do not insist on this point, Kierkegaard thinks that we lose sight of the place played by the will; a human being becomes a purely intellectual creature.

Reflection for Kierkegaard has a potentially infinite quality. Anyone who has agonized over ordering from a menu in a restaurant understands that the reflection that precedes a choice can be indefinitely extended and the choice postponed. Thought never brings itself to a close. Rather, the person must choose to end the process of reflection, and this happens when a person is motivated to act and thus brings deliberation to closure. One element that is required is affective; Kierkegaard rejects the idea of a *liberum arbitrium*, a disinterested will that is objective and neutral. Rather, our willing is always done in the context of our desires and passions. Nevertheless, the will is not simply the outcome of the desires a person feels at a given moment; we have some ability to weight our desires and—over time—to form them, through repeated choices of the will.

It is this power to will that gives us ultimate responsibility for our lives. A comparison with the well-known theory of action developed by Donald Davidson shows that Kierkegaard shares the fundamental intuition of contemporary libertarian philosophers of action: we are ultimately responsible only for what we can will or not will, or that is the result of past actions that we could have willed or not willed. Such a concept of will implies that there is something mysterious about the human self, which is the province of the leap, Kierkegaard's general term for a significant free act. Human acts are not radical choices. They are performed for reasons. The reasons, however, do not in the end determine what we do and thus do not fully explain what we do, at least in the scientific sense of "explain." Yet failure to accept this mystery ultimately leads to a view of the self that eliminates any sense of the self as a meaningful agent.

In conclusion, I suggest that the demand for a full explanation of human action is akin to the demand of the classical foundationalist that our reasons for belief be absolutely certain. Both in the cases of action and belief, we are creatures whose reasoning plays a fundamental role in our lives, but whose reason must be understood as the reason of creatures who are fundamentally passionate beings.

The overall picture of Kierkegaard that emerges from these essays is not a picture of an irrational fideist who rejects reason, but a picture of a

Christian philosopher who sees the limits of human reason, limits that must be recognized in the context of human finitude and sinfulness and divine revelation and authority. I am convinced that if we read Kierkegaard with this kind of picture in the background, we are better positioned to hear the twin messages I have claimed he has to offer the contemporary world. To the secular world Kierkegaard does indeed offer a powerful account of faith, including a diagnosis of why faith in the contemporary intellectual world has ebbed and a prescription for recovery of faith's vitality. To the Church he offers a stinging rebuke of "Christendom," whether that be in the form of an established Church or an unofficial "civil religion." It is only when we understand that to be a Christian is to respond to the call of a God who speaks, not simply through human culture or philosophy, but through Jesus of Nazareth, that we can be prepared to be salt and light, or—as Kierkegaard himself thought would be the case—suffering "witnesses to the truth" in a time of great cultural and political darkness.

PART TWO

Kierkegaard the Philosopher

Chapter 2

Realism and Antirealism in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

If a reader should go into a good library and browse through the books about Kierkegaard, she would, I think, be struck immediately by a significant difference between most of the older books and quite a few, though certainly not all, of the more recent volumes. Older books, such as James Collins's *The Mind of Kierkegaard*,[1] tended to see Kierkegaard primarily as a philosopher, albeit an unusual one with poetic gifts and religious interests. By and large, they approached Kierkegaard as one would approach other philosophers, inquiring as to his views on ethics, epistemology, and other standard philosophical issues. The underlying assumption is that Kierkegaard had convictions about such issues, and that those convictions might be, in part or as a whole, true or false, correct or incorrect.

Roger Poole's *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* may serve as a good example of the type of later book I have in mind, though works by such authors as Louis Mackey, Sylviane Agacinski, John Vignaux Smythe, and John D. Caputo would serve equally well. Poole explicitly distances himself from the tradition—one that he stigmatizes as "theological"—that understands Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works as containing philosophical doctrines.[2] On his view, "Kierkegaard writes text after text whose aim is not to state a truth, not to clarify an issue, not to propose a definite doctrine, not to offer some meaning that could be directly appropriated."[3] Kierkegaard cannot offer us objective truth because he is seen as committed to a view of language and meaning similar to that of Derrida and Lacan. In order for propositions to have fixed truth values, they must be about something, and

Kierkegaard's texts do not refer in this way. "The texts demonstrate to a nicety the Lacanian perception that all we are ever offered in a text is an endless succession of signifiers."[4]

One way of understanding the difference between these two approaches is in terms of the contemporary philosophical debate between realism and antirealism. I mean by this the debate as to whether there is a mind-independent reality, a reality that exists independently of human judgments and by virtue of which those judgments are true or false. Of course the antirealist accepts what we all call "the real world" in one sense. What the antirealist denies is that human language can refer to the world as it is in itself, apart from our human concepts and classifications, which in turn reflect our human activities and interests.

This debate could be characterized in terms of a disagreement about language, a dispute about meaning and reference, or as a disagreement about truth and the existence of mind-independent reality. Although each way of describing the dispute could provide a basis for an illuminating look at Kierkegaard, I wish to focus on the concepts of truth and mind-independent reality. That these concepts are central to the debate can hardly be denied. For example, William Alston describes realism as the claim that "whatever there is is what it is regardless of how we think of it," combined with the belief that there is in fact something.[5] Alvin Plantinga says that the dispute centers on the antirealist claim that "objects . . . are not ontologically independent of persons and their ways of thinking and behaving."[6] Sometimes the dependence of truth on human knowers is characterized epistemically. Thus, Hilary Putnam describes the realism he wished at one time to reject in the following terms: "a distinguishing feature of the realistic sense of 'true' is it is logically possible for even the best attested statement to be false."[7]

Despite the fact that Kierkegaard is famous (or infamous) for the claim in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that "truth is subjectivity," the contemporary debate about realism and antirealism has not paid a great deal of attention to Kierkegaard.[8] There are occasional references and hints that Kierkegaard has something to say about these issues. For example, Richard Rorty identifies Kierkegaard as one who rejects the Socratic assumption that humans have a timeless "truth-tracking faculty called Reason" in favor of the view that the point of departure of human knowers may simply be a contingent historical event.[9] Still, by and large, Kierkegaard's voice has not been prominent, at least in the Anglo-American venue for the debate. So it seems quite appropriate to take a closer look at Kierkegaard, and particularly at *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, to see what Kierkegaard might have to say about this dispute. Such a look may have the added bonus of clarifying the

way we read Kierkegaard himself, and giving critical perspective on both of the streams of scholarly literature that continue to appear about him. Is Kierkegaard a realist or is he better understood as at least a precursor of contemporary antirealism?

Antirealistic Tests in *Postscript*

It is hardly surprising that Kierkegaard should be read as an antirealist in the sense of someone who denies there is any mind-independent reality. After all, Kierkegaard is known preeminently as the philosopher of subjectivity, and so it seems reasonable to take him as agreeing with Putnam that "the worm of the human" lies over everything, including our knowledge of reality. Nevertheless, such a general impression of Kierkegaard as a philosopher of subjectivity hardly settles the issue, since it leaves vague the nature of subjectivity and what Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity means and implies. We must therefore look at specific texts.

I should like to say at the outset that the question as to whether Kierkegaard is a realist or antirealist in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* cannot be settled in a simple proof-text manner by producing passages that appear to favor one view. For one thing, as I shall presently show by illustration, there are passages that appear to support each side of the debate, as well as plenty that are ambiguous. For another, as we shall see, there are plausible explanations each side can give of the passages that appear to support the other side. Nevertheless, it is helpful to begin by considering some passages that appear to support both antirealism and realism, to give some content to the argument. I shall begin with some passages that appear to be antirealist in their thrust.

An important test case concerns the nature of God and knowledge of God. Is God a metaphysical reality who exists independently of human consciousness? If so, some kind of realism would seem to be presupposed. However, there are numerous passages in *Postscript* that appear to take an antirealist view of God. In these passages, God is not regarded as an objective reality existing independently of human consciousness, but is in some way "constituted" by subjectivity: "But freedom, that is the wonderous lamp; when a person rubs it with ethical passion: God then comes into existence for him" (CUP 1:138).

How can God "come into existence" for a person? One possible answer is suggested somewhat later: "For God is not something outward, like a wife, whom I can ask whether she is now satisfied with me . . . because God is not some outward thing, but is the infinite itself, is not something outward that

quarrels with me when I do wrong but the infinite itself that does not need scolding words, but whose vengeance is terrible—the vengeance that God does not exist for me at all, even though I pray" (CUP 1:162–63). Though this passage is, to say the least, somewhat obscure, one might construe it to mean that awareness of God's reality is simply awareness of some infinite idea in consciousness, perhaps consciousness of an infinite moral demand, which has no existence independent of consciousness. On this reading, belief in God would be something rather like belief in an absolute moral standard. Of course one might construe this moral standard as an objective reality and thus assume a realistic posture toward it, but one might also think of it in quasi-Kantian terms, as a moral law that the moral agent himself creates. (Of course Kant himself also says that moral duties are to be seen as divine commands, but one could imagine someone who interpreted such talk as being a poetic way of emphasizing the objectivity or absoluteness of the moral law.)

Such passages can be construed in ways consistent with realism. One might say, for example, that Kierkegaard means only that God comes into existence for a person in the sense that the person first becomes aware of God's reality when she acts freely and responsibly. And we have just seen that the "infinite" that consciousness discovers could be construed metaphysically as having some ontological status independent of the consciousness that conceives of the demand. Nonetheless, I think one must admit that these passages, taken alone, do not require such a realistic reading, and that an antirealistic construal might be regarded as providing a more natural interpretation.

One might also argue that even if Kierkegaard takes an antirealistic view of God, this does not imply any general commitment to antirealism. Perhaps it is only moral and religious truths that are to be construed in an antirealist manner. Such a position is suggested by passages like the following: "If now Christianity is essentially something objective, it is right for the observer to be objective; but if Christianity is essentially subjectivity, it is a mistake if the observer is objective. In relation to all knowing in which it holds true that the object of cognition is the inwardness of the subjective individual himself, it holds true that the knower must be in this condition" (CUP 1:53). The commitment to antirealism seems very strong here; in the case of Christianity, the "object of cognition" is not a reality existing independently of the knower, but something internal to the consciousness of the individual. Nevertheless, one might argue that this does not involve any general commitment to philosophical antirealism. On the contrary, there is in the passage an implied contrast between knowing that has a realistic object and

knowing that takes "inwardness" itself as its object. Nevertheless, such an antirealism about moral and religious truth, even if it is not a universal antirealism, is very significant, since for many readers of Kierkegaard and doubtless for Kierkegaard himself, moral and religious truth is fundamentally important.

Realistic Texts in *Postscript*

From a purely textual point of view, such antirealistic passages are by no means the whole story, however. There are many texts that, on the surface at least, seem to presuppose a more traditional, realistic view of God. For example, God is frequently described as the creator of the natural world, but it seems evident that only an objectively existing being could create a world. An infinite moral demand that I place upon myself hardly seems capable of the job of creation. Though God is not straightforwardly present in his creation, it is nonetheless his creation: "Nature is certainly the work of God, but only the work is directly present, not God" (CUP 1:243). Subjectivity, on this view, does not bring God into existence, but is rather the condition for epistemic awareness of God: "Nature, the totality of creation, is God's work, and yet God is not there, but within the individual human being there is a possibility (he is spirit according to his possibility) that in inwardness is awakened to a God-relationship, and then it is possible to see God in everything" (1:246–47).

There are many similar passages that describe God as Creator, as the one who needs no human person to carry out his plans, and as the one who assigns to humans tasks that may or may not have world-historical significance (see, e.g., CUP 1:136, 137, 139). Nevertheless, such passages, while certainly appearing to presuppose a realistic view of God, are no more decisive than are those that appear to take a more antirealistic view. Readers who view Kierkegaard as thoroughly elusive may well read such passages ironically and suggest that it is a mistake to try to read his texts "straight," as if they contained doctrines. (Of course taking this line implies that one must be similarly suspicious of passages that appear to propound in a straight manner antirealistic views.) Even if one does not assume that a kind of global ironical perspective undermines the possibility of taking such apparent assertions as assertions, one might still hold that the apparently realistic language is not to be taken literally. Rather, Kierkegaard may be using traditional religious language but infusing it with radically new existential and pragmatic content, speaking poetically and not literally.

The Question of Method

One might think that the question of Kierkegaard's view of the realism debate could be resolved if we had some general guidance as to how such texts as the ones disputed above should be read. Can we presuppose some hermeneutical method, some theory as to how to approach philosophical texts in general and Kierkegaard's texts in particular? There are of course general interpretative perspectives that will resolve the issues, but the adoption of one such perspective is hardly the adoption of a neutral method that will resolve the dispute impartially. Rather, in this case it is clear that the interpretative perspective one takes presupposes some view on the very issues under consideration.

For example, if one argues that every text in some sense deconstructs' by failing to communicate what the author intended, and that it is impossible for a text to affirm propositions that are objectively true, then it is quite clear that Kierkegaard's texts will not function in the way realists assume. Furthermore, if one assumes that Kierkegaard himself realized this, then one can go on to interpret his whole edifice of pseudonyms and irony and humor as attempts to express this insight, perhaps as an attempt to "show" what cannot be "said," to use Wittgenstein's language. On such a reading Kierkegaard is an antirealist who recognized that it would be incoherent to assert the objective truth of antirealism and hence tried to express his insights in an appropriately elusive manner. That such an approach is possible is demonstrated by the newer type of literature I began by describing, but the perspective adopted by this mode of reading is hardly dispassionate and objective with respect to the dispute about realism. Rather, it amounts to a demonstration that if one assumes the truth of antirealism, and assumes that Kierkegaard realized this truth, then one can read Kierkegaard as an antirealist.

Of course, realist readings may be equally question-begging. To go to the opposite extreme from radical deconstructionism, if one assumes that the meaning of a text is fixed objectively by the author's intentions and assumes there is a fact of the matter as to what Kierkegaard intended, then presumably one can take seriously some of Kierkegaard's seemingly objective claims about God. (At least one can do this if one has reason to think that Kierkegaard intended those claims to be read as objectively true.) But once more a realistic account of truth seems to be presupposed by the hermeneutical theory employed, and it is also assumed that Kierkegaard accepted such a view. It is hardly surprising that if we assume realism and assume that Kierkegaard accepted realism, we can successfully read Kierkegaard as a realist.

Obviously there are theories of meaning that lie between radical deconstructionism and objective authorial intent. However, my point is that there are no neutral, noncontroversial theories that will give us a method for objectively settling the question as to how Kierkegaard should be read. One's readings of Kierkegaard will inevitably be shaped, to a greater or lesser degree, by one's global commitments about meaning in general and Kierkegaard's literature as a whole.

I do not believe that the impossibility of a method in this case means that meaningful conversation and dispute between the antagonists is impossible. Rather, it seems to me that each differing view can develop both overall comprehensive readings as well as readings of particular texts and books. Opponents can imaginatively "try on" alternative readings and test them by their ability to illuminate and clarify the text and to resolve problems that are posed therein. Although no neutral ground can be found to resolve the dispute once and for all, conversions may happen, and even without conversion, give and take is possible in which each side may learn from others in the conversation.

The story that follows is one that fits with the broader story I have elsewhere given about Kierkegaard.[10] It is in one sense a realistic reading in that I take seriously the philosophical claims made in the text as claims that can be defended or criticized by arguments. Pragmatically, this seems to me to be the best approach to the text, since even if Kierkegaard's writings are ironical through and through, there is a sense in which the irony will be undermined if we do not "play along" and take the particular claims and arguments seriously. A global sense that everything in the text is ironical can, ironically enough, make it impossible for us to recognize whatever ironical elements are present. Roger Poole's claim that Kierkegaard's texts consist of "literary machines that . . . actually work but carry out no function at all"[11] can be just the kind of a priori straightjacket that Poole argues characterizes what he calls "theologically driven" readings of Kierkegaard. I believe that taking Kierkegaard seriously as a philosopher can illuminate the realism debate, because Kierkegaard seems to accept the kinds of epistemological premises that are often regarded as justifying antirealism, but he combines these epistemological views with a quite traditional acceptance of realism.

Kierkegaard on Kant and Hegel

The contemporary debate about realism and antirealism is preeminently a debate about Kantian issues. Antirealists such as Putnam are not Berkeleyan idealists; in some sense they recognize that there is a "real world" that is

objective over against the individual, and that in ordinary life we distinguish between true and false statements about that world. The debate concerns the status of that world. Is it in some sense the world *as it appears to us*, a phenomenal world, or is there such a thing as the world *as it is in itself*? Hilary Putnam's 1976 presidential address to the Eastern American Philosophical Association makes this Kantian structure explicit. After discussing Kant's view that knowledge is a "representation" that is the work of a "transcendental me," Putnam explains his own position: "I would modify Kant's image in two ways. The authors (in the plural—my image of knowledge is social) don't write just *one* story: they write many versions. And the authors in the stories are the *real* authors. This would be 'crazy' if these stories were *fictions*. A fictitious character can't also be a real author. But these are true stories."[12]

In light of this Kantian framing of the problem, it is illuminating to examine Kierkegaard's own comments on Kant in chapter 3 of *Postscript*, which contains a discussion as to whether Hegel has given an adequate answer to "Kantian skepticism." This discussion is initially puzzling in a number of ways. In the debate Kant is viewed as a skeptic who denied the possibility of knowledge of the "real world." Hegel on the other hand is described as a purported realist who attempted to answer this Kantian skepticism.

One might also wonder what this debate about skepticism has to do with the debate about realism. After all, it would seem that one could be a skeptic *and* a realist, affirming that there is an independent reality while denying we have any knowledge about that reality. I think Kierkegaard would affirm the coherence of such a position. However, though it appears possible to be a skeptic and still be a realist, the refutation of skepticism would seem to require the triumph of realism, unless the triumph over skepticism is itself an illusion. As we shall see, this is precisely what Kierkegaard thinks Hegel's overcoming of Kant amounts to.

It might seem that Kierkegaard has the positions of Kant and Hegel reversed. After all, Hegel is known as the proponent of philosophical idealism, while Kant's philosophy can be seen as committed to realism in at least two respects. First, there is Kant's "empirical realism," where Kant sees himself as refuting Humean skepticism and vindicating the objectivity of scientific knowledge. Though it is true that this knowledge turns out to be knowledge of appearances, it is still in one sense objective for Kant. Second, one must also recognize Kant's defense of "noumenal reality," his contention that even if knowledge is in some sense of reality as it appears to us, there is such a thing as reality in itself, a reality that turns out to be significant for moral and religious ends in the second *Critique*.

A closer look at Kierkegaard's text shows that he is not really confused. Since the point of the chapter is to criticize Hegel's claim to have successfully answered Kant, it is reasonable for Kierkegaard to view Kant through Hegelian eyes. And the picture sketched is precisely the portrait Hegel paints: Hegel sees himself as vindicating "absolute knowledge" against the Kantian "idealism" that limits human knowledge to appearances. Kierkegaard's own critical perspective on Hegel is that in fact Hegel's answer to Kant is no answer at all. Hegel's vindication of "absolute knowledge" is an illusion, and his answer to what Hegel sees as Kant's skepticism is actually a deeper and more insidious form of skepticism. As we shall see, Kierkegaard's own view turns out to be quite similar to Kant's, though it is not clear whether Kierkegaard is aware of this.[13]

As Kierkegaard tells the tale, Hegel's answer to Kant's skepticism rests on the validity of Hegel's "method." Hegel's dialectical method was supposed to enable the thinker to reach the standpoint of "pure thought," the exalted viewpoint of reason that leaves behind the thinking of the understanding, which is tied to the traditional Aristotelian principle of noncontradiction. From this exalted viewpoint, the thinker can mediate philosophical disagreements, seeing the truth contained in rival viewpoints and incorporating those truths in increasingly adequate and more comprehensive perspectives. Kantian skepticism is not merely confronted with a dogmatic denial. Rather, the standpoint of absolute knowledge is supposed to emerge from the process of reflection that has itself generated Kantian skepticism. The skeptical standpoint is in some way supposed to overcome itself. Though there is an obvious Cartesian flavor to this idea (we discover absolute certainty by an attempt at universal doubt), at the heart of it lies the Hegelian conviction that skepticism, like every other one-sided philosophical doctrine, contains the seeds of its own destruction, but that this is a destruction which does not merely negate but also constructively preserves what is right about skepticism.

Kierkegaard makes several criticisms of this Hegelian project. First of all, he rejects the idea that doubt can overcome itself. Echoing his own earlier discussion of skepticism in *Philosophical Fragments*, he claims that skepticism is in some sense a willed standpoint (CUP 1:335–36n). He does not mean, as is sometimes thought, that people can in general voluntarily control their beliefs.[14] Rather, he means that those who adopt a global skeptical attitude basically do so because they want to be skeptics. To the degree that skepticism rests on a resolution, it can only be ended by a resolution.

The second charge he makes is that the knowledge of noumenal reality that "pure thought" is supposed to achieve is illusory. From Kierkegaard's

viewpoint, thinking always employs universal concepts; to think about some concrete reality is always to apply to it some concept, and for Kierkegaard a concept is essentially a possibility, a *possible way of being*. This means that the concrete actuality of the object of thought cannot itself be made an object of thought. The "identity of thought and being" reached by pure thought is an illusion because when "being" is thought, it is transformed into possibility, and one "abstracts" from its actuality, which is bound up with its concrete particularity. So, ideally speaking, thought and being are identical, but only in the sense that being as thought is equivalent to thought. The union of thought and being is far from a vindication of realism; it in fact is a sign that thinking has totally abandoned any attempt to make contact with actuality and is content with the world of possibility (CUP 1:331).

Kierkegaard's claim that thinking necessarily fails to grasp being in its concrete actuality seems to put him on the side of the skeptic. However, he has his own answer to the skeptic, one that emphasizes what might be called the noumenal quality of the thinker's own existence. The existing individual can know himself as actuality without transforming that actuality into possibility. The individual subject "is able to know what lives within him—the only actuality that does not become a possibility by being known and is not something that can be known only by being thought" (CUP 1:320). I take this to mean that the individual's own existential reality can therefore be thought and known, and that it is the only concrete actuality for which this is the case. It is not known only by being thought, and it can be thought without its actuality being annulled. So Kierkegaard's alternative solution to the problem of "Kantian" skepticism turns out to look remarkably like Kant's own perspective, which limits theoretical reason to knowledge of the phenomenal world so as to allow room for the perspective of the rational agent—one who has rational faith in his own existence as a free being and grounds his belief in God and immortality on this practical faith.

This is not a reversion to the Cartesian cogito, because the reality known is not merely the reality of consciousness, which would merely be awareness of possibility, but the reality of agency, the passionate transformation of possibility into actuality. It does threaten, like the Cartesian cogito, to imply some kind of solipsism, or "acosmism," as Kierkegaard himself notes.[15] That is, one might take Kierkegaard here to be saying that the only "thing in itself" that can be known is the agent's own reality, and thus that one must take a skeptical position about the external world.

That Kierkegaard has a genuine sympathy for skepticism cannot be denied. In the last analysis, however, he is not himself a skeptic. To see this one must recognize that Kierkegaard uses the term "knowledge" in two dif-

ferent ways. At times he uses knowledge as requiring the kind of certainty that classical foundationalism believed was required for knowledge. It is in this sense that he claims that the only actuality an individual can know is his or her own ethical actuality. At other times Kierkegaard uses the term "knowledge" in a different and much looser sense. He recognizes that there is a broad class of things that in everyday life are regarded as known. For example, in *Philosophical Fragments* he says that he assumes that there is such a thing as knowledge of the past, and only wants to know how this knowledge is acquired (81).

This looks like a contradiction: we only know our own existence; we know many things. However, no contradiction is really implied. The underlying issue is the demand for objective certainty present in classical epistemologies. If one accepts this demand, Kierkegaard argues, nothing can be known except the individual's own ethical reality. Kierkegaard himself, however, is not committed to this ideal and seeks to undermine it by showing that much of what we accept as knowledge in ordinary life does not meet it.

If we consider the comments Kierkegaard makes about skepticism in *Philosophical Fragments*, as well as his thoughts on historical knowledge in *Postscript*, the following picture emerges: Kierkegaard's view is not that human knowers can never make contact with an external world, but that all such contact involves *faith* or *belief* (same Danish word for both, *tro*) (72–88). The idea is not that people are imprisoned within their own consciousness but that knowledge of the external world is never objectively certain. All such knowledge involves a risk, the possibility of error, and such a possibility must be annulled by the decision not to take the skeptical attitude. Once more this claim does not have to be understood as implying direct voluntary control over individual beliefs but as a claim that knowledge of the external world requires one to reject what might be called the life-view of the skeptic.

In *Philosophical Fragments* this claim is illustrated enigmatically via a discussion of faith or belief. There Kierkegaard says that "immediate sensation and immediate knowing cannot deceive" (81).[16] Thus, when a person sees a star or experiences an event, something is immediately present and certain. However, as soon as the person forms a judgment about the content of the experience, for example, by holding the belief that the star is a star—an objective part of the physical world—then there is uncertainty, because the reality of the star as a public object with a history cannot be immediately sensed (81). One could say that uncertainty is present as soon as the star is viewed as a thing in itself, a mind-independent reality whose existence transcendsconsciousness of it. Kierkegaard argues that this uncertainty must in

some way be negated, and that the attitude that in fact carries out the task is known as faith or belief. Since the object of historical inquiry is by definition such a real event, something that really happened, it follows that faith is an essential component in what we normally call historical knowledge (81–82). (And it is important to note that Kierkegaard does not deny that there is such a thing as historical knowledge.)

In all of this Kierkegaard seems to be committed to a kind of metaphysical realism. It is precisely the objectivity and mind-independent character of existent objects that makes knowledge of such objects uncertain in character. For example, Kierkegaard describes historical knowledge as "approximative" in character. But if our knowledge of history is approximative, this seems to imply that there is some kind of ideal to be approximated, and what else can such an ideal be but that of an accurate representation of the object of knowledge? In claiming that historical knowledge can never be more than approximative, Kierkegaard is not denying the independence of the object of knowledge. On the contrary, he is presupposing it. Even the best and most exact human knowledge is subject to error, because existing objects have an illusiveness that is grounded in their independence of us and our concepts and methods of knowing (PF 82).

But is this realism consistent with the claims that all thought "abstracts from existence" and that all thinking involves a transformation of actuality into possibility? How can I know a reality that I must conceive as a possibility? It is here that the significance becomes apparent in Kierkegaard's claim that my own existence can be both *thought* and *known* as actuality. It is not that I attempt to infer the existence of an external reality from my own existence in a Cartesian fashion. There is no way to obtain objective certainty with regard to existing realities other than myself. If we adopt the epistemic standards of modern classical foundationalism, we will become skeptics about the external world, and Kierkegaard thinks that Greek skepticism should have taught us this already. We arrive at the external world only through faith or belief. Nevertheless, we can arrive there. We can do so because we have a sense of what it means to exist in actuality, and we have such a sense because we know ourselves as actual agents.

Kierkegaard says that existence is not a concept, and hence it is incorrect to say we learn the meaning of existence from our own case in the sense that we might learn the meaning of "white" by seeing white objects. Nevertheless, we do have a sense of what it means to exist, and we do make judgments about what things exist and what things do not, and the attitude Kierkegaard calls "belief" is an expression of this distinction. One way of expressing this would be to say that one must analyze an individual's belief about an inde-

pendent reality as a linking of thought-possibilities with that individual's own existence. Though I have no *concept* of existence, I know what it means to exist by existing.[17] Believing that my friend John exists amounts to linking John in some ways to that concrete actuality that is thought without becoming a mere possibility, namely, my own actuality. John is *my* friend, the one with whom I went through high school and college.

Kierkegaard says explicitly that knowledge of past historical figures requires a link to my own existence. To understand the actions of a person in the past, I must conceive of that individual as an agent like myself, either by imaginatively placing myself in his shoes or imaginatively placing him in mine (CUP 1:146). Historical knowledge, however, is tied to my own existence in two other ways. First, this knowledge is rooted in a passion-driven attitude we call belief, and since passion is the heart of existence, we can say that belief or faith is itself a part of my existence. Second, the content of faith or belief is linked to existence. What does it mean to believe that Julius Caesar existed, as opposed to merely contemplating the possibility of his existence? It means that in some very complicated ways I believe that Julius Caesar is tied to that stream of passionate doings that I know as my own existence. Whether I see Caesar as my forerunner, my causal antecedent, or the creator of monuments I or others I know might visit, in thinking of him as actual I necessarily link him in my thought to the only actuality that I know as actual.

In looking at Kierkegaard's critical perspectives on the Hegelian claim to have overcome "Kantian skepticism," we see then an interesting blend of epistemic attitudes. There is on the one hand a strong dose of epistemological humility, an attitude that borders on skepticism; the only "thing in itself" humans can know with any certainty *as actual* is the reality of their own existence as agents. The actuality of other realities is only apprehended through faith or belief. Nevertheless, it is the *actuality* of those other realities that is believed, and faith or belief makes possible what Kierkegaard calls an "approximative" type of knowledge. This approximative character is an indicator both of the limits of human knowledge and the realistic and independent character of what is known.

Realism and Truth

What light does all this throw on Kierkegaard's famous discussion of truth and his claim that "truth is subjectivity" in *Postscript*? The discussion begins with a brief look at two theories of truth: the "empirical" (correspondence) definition of truth as "the agreement of thinking with being" and the

idealistic definition of truth as "the agreement of being with thinking" (CUP 1:189–90). Summary criticisms are made of each view.

The idealistic formula is described as merely tautological, for as we have just seen, the being that is the object of thought is not actual being but being *as thought*. Hence the agreement between being and thought in this case is merely the agreement of thinking with thinking (CUP 1:190). The heart of this criticism is the claim that abstract thought deals not with actual existence but with ideal conceptualizations. Thus, the point made is essentially the same as that implied by the discussion of "systems," where it is asserted that, for human beings, a "logical system is possible," but an "existential system" is not possible (1:109). Human beings can develop conceptual systems or models, but as soon as they are applied to actual being they become approximations or hypotheses (1:110).[18]

This last point leads directly to the criticism made of the "empiricist" or correspondence theory of truth, which is that truth on this account becomes an ideal that can never be fully realized. This is so because both the actuality that is being represented and the knower are "unfinished" and in process. Kierkegaard here can be understood as emphasizing the tentative, never finalized character of empirical inquiry, which is rooted both in the complexity and flux-suffused qualities of what is known, as well as the finitude and uncertainty linked to the temporal character of the knower. The objection here seems not to be to correspondence as an *ideal*.[19] Indeed, Kierkegaard seems to assume that no other ideal makes any sense. Rather, the objection is to any claim that the ideal can be finally and fully actualized. As I have already argued, such a claim, while it may be subject to criticism for being overly skeptical, is not antirealistic. Rather, it rests on what Hilary Putnam has termed the defining tenet of realism, the radically nonepistemic character of truth. It is just because reality is ultimately independent of human minds that human attempts to know that reality must always be approximations.

Kierkegaard thus seems to combine an epistemology that rejects classical foundationalism with a traditional, realistic account of the aim of knowing. He seems postmodern in his account of knowledge, yet modern or really premodern in his understanding of truth. Such a combination is puzzling to many. How can one believe in an objective, mind-independent reality and at the same time deny that human beings have final knowledge of such a reality? Can we view our beliefs as approximations of an ideal truth if we never possess that truth? How can one say there is a thing in itself and then deny that we humans ever finally know what that is? At this point the antirealist argues that the thing in itself is a meaningless or perhaps useless ideal.

Richard Rorty, for example, argues that realism only makes sense if one asserts that humans have some kind of direct access to reality, some mode of "givenness," such that we can compare our ideas with a reality that is known independently of those ideas. But since we have no such access to reality, Rorty asserts we must give up the ideal of truth as "contact with reality" in favor of truth as "what it is good for us to believe."[20]

It is just at this point that Kierkegaard's view is most illuminating. For he rejects an often unnoticed premise that is common both to the classical foundationalist and the antirealist postmodernist. Both agree that *if* there is to be knowledge of objective reality, there must be some method of obtaining certain knowledge about that reality. The classical foundationalist, from Descartes through Husserl, concludes that since there is objective knowledge there must be such a method. The antirealist concludes that since there is no such method there is no knowledge of objective reality. We can see lurking behind Rorty's antirealism the dashed hopes and disappointments of the classical foundationalist.

On Kierkegaard's view, though there is no "absolute given" and no method that can be relied upon to produce certain, objective knowledge, empirical knowledge necessarily aims at such knowledge. He never doubts that this ideal of objective knowledge is valid as an ideal or that there is a reality independent of us that we are attempting to know. But if we do not *know* this objective reality with certainty, how can we be *certain* it is even there? If we do not have absolute truth, how can we be sure it is there as an ideal to approximate?

One might think that Kierkegaard could appeal to God's omniscience at this point, since he clearly asserts that, although no existential system is possible for humans, reality is indeed a system for God. There is absolute, objective truth about the actual world: it is found in God's view of that world. On this point Merold Westphal is quite right to point out that there are different forms of antirealism, and that Kant and Kierkegaard should be understood in the context of their theistic beliefs.[21] Like Kant himself, when Kierkegaard insists that human knowledge is always approximative in character, he is not denying there is absolute truth but affirming the finitude of human attempts to realize that truth.

Though there is clearly a link between belief in God and belief in objective truth, I am inclined to think that the inference goes the other way for Kierkegaard. That is, I think he would be more inclined to say we must believe in God because we believe in an objective truth than that we believe in objective truth because we believe in God. Certainly, Kierkegaard cannot here appeal to God to complete his own system. He rejects objective proofs

of God's existence, and any objective assurance of God's reality, so he cannot appeal to God as an objective proof that there is objective truth. In any case, to believe in God we must already believe in objective truth, since we can hardly believe in God, trust God, place our hope in God, and at the same time fail to believe in God's objective reality.

If we ask why Kierkegaard believes in an objective reality as what knowledge attempts to approximate, the answer seems to be that this is part of the structure of belief or faith. That is just what a belief *is* or *does*. The mind-independent character of reality is precisely what gives belief its risky character. Belief is just the human attitude that takes this risk and takes what is apprehended as *real*.

As I have repeatedly stated, this is not to say that individual beliefs are voluntary actions, and it does not mean that beliefs are always hard to come by. On the contrary, Kierkegaard seems to be of the opinion, shared by Hume and Reid and Moore, that certain kinds of beliefs are just natural though perhaps not inevitable; they are called forth by life itself.[22] Skepticism, then, is difficult; one must work to be a skeptic.

Truth and Subjectivity

If Kierkegaard is a realist and accepts objective truth as an ideal to be approximated, then in what sense does he hold that "truth is subjectivity"? First of all, it should be noted that the claim that truth is subjectivity, far from denying the objectivity of propositional truth, includes an affirmation of such truth:

> *When truth is asked about objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself. What is reflected upon is not the relation but that it is the truth, the true, to which the knower relates. If that to which he relates himself simply is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. When truth is asked about subjectively the individual's relation is reflected upon subjectively. If this relation's how is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he thereby relates himself to untruth.* (CUP 1:199; italics in original)

This paragraph assumes that there is such a thing as objective propositional truth. That is, it assumes that it is possible for an individual to believe what is not objectively true even if the individual herself is in some sense in the truth, just as it assumes that an individual can believe what is objectively true while being personally in untruth. Kierkegaard illustrates this claim by the famous comparison between the pagan who prays with the passion of infinity, even though he lacks objective knowledge of God, and the Christian who

prays in a false spirit, even though he presumably has objective knowledge (CUP 1:201). The life of the pagan in such a case is the one that contains "more truth."

The thesis that truth is subjectivity is explicitly said to apply only to a particular kind of truth, the truth that is "essential" to human existence, and it is clear enough that for Kierkegaard this means moral and religious truth, the truth about how human life should be lived. The point is not to deny that there are objective moral and religious truths, but to raise the question as to how a person can learn to live truly. What is it that makes a person's life true?

But can a life be true? Or is this merely using the word "true" in a misleading, metaphorical way? For Kierkegaard, human existence curiously mirrors human knowing, but with what might be called a reverse directionality. In knowing, we attempt to reproduce or reduplicate reality, and though we speak of some of these attempts as knowledge and regard knowing as a case where our thought accurately mirrors reality, Kierkegaard says that such efforts are never final but always approximative and tentative. In any case the propositions we believe are themselves ideal objects, not spatio-temporal actualities. Propositions do not *exist*, though believings of them are acts of or states of existing beings.

Existence, like knowing, involves a "reduplication," because it involves the actualization of conceived possibilities. A life can correspond, or fail to correspond, to its ideals. The question concerns how a life can truly correspond in this way. Does a person live truly if and only if that person has the right beliefs, that is, objectively true moral and religious beliefs? Or is it rather the case that a person can have objectively true beliefs about morality and human life and still live falsely? And can a person whose beliefs are objectively false still be a person whose life contains truth?

Kierkegaard says, with respect to such questions, that "the answer cannot be in doubt for anyone who is not totally botched by scientific scholarship" (CUP 1:201). It is not hard to see why he thinks the answer is so easy. We all know people who hold what we think are objectively false beliefs about moral and religious matters but who live lives that seem to exhibit those qualities human existence is supposed to manifest. And we all know people who appear to have what we think are objectively correct beliefs but whose lives are characterized by moral failure and hypocrisy. The crucial question for Kierkegaard then is not whether a person's beliefs are objectively right but whether the person has the right kind of relationship to what is believed.

Such a position appears to be naive. What about the sincere Nazi? One might agree that it is important existentially to realize one's ideals, but surely

it is also important that one have the right ideals. The "how" may be important, but the "what" seems important as well.

I think Kierkegaard can accommodate this worry. In the end, his position is not that what a person believes is unimportant but that how a person believes is crucially important. In comparing the pagan who prays to the idol with the passion of infinity and the Christian who prays to the true God in a false spirit, the point is not that the pagan has supremely realized the truth. The claim made is that there is more truth in the life of the pagan. In effect, Kierkegaard says that if you had to choose between these two options, you would be much better off if you chose to be the pagan. But that is compatible with saying the pagan would be better off still if he had true beliefs.

In fact, one reason the pagan is better off than the hypocritical Christian is precisely that he is more likely to gain true beliefs. For what Kierkegaard finally wishes to claim about moral and religious truth is that whatever knowledge we gain about such matters is gained through having the right kind of subjectivity. It is for this reason that the person who rubs the lamp of freedom with ethical passion finds God. This is the case not because there is no objective truth about such matters but because God has providentially arranged that moral and religious insight is gained only through moral and religious striving.

Whether this is an adequate answer to the problem of the "sincere Nazi" I shall not attempt to say. But I can say that Kierkegaard's conviction that truth is gained through and realized in subjectivity is not a repudiation of realism with respect to propositional truth about anything, including religious issues. God's reality is not founded in any human activity. Rather, it is because it is objectively true that there is a God who desires humans to live truly that the world has been arranged in such a manner that finding moral and religious truth is linked to the development of the right kind of subjectivity. It is because of God that finding the truth about God is logically dependent on learning to live truly.

Chapter 3

Kant and Kierkegaard on the Possibility of Metaphysics

Although those philosophers termed "postmodernist" would seem to have little in common with logical positivists, one trait these two groups of philosophers share is a distaste for metaphysics. Though it may well be true that each group has a very different conception of metaphysics, and even that each in its positive thrust exemplifies what the other wishes to stigmatize as metaphysics, it remains true that for each "metaphysics" is a term of abuse. However, philosophers should not necessarily shrink from embracing terms of abuse. One of the things I admire about William James is his willingness to do this in his celebrated essay "The Dilemma of Determinism." In James's essay, which I will discuss in more detail later, he makes a present of the desirable term "freedom" to his soft determinist opponents and is content to fight under the banner of the much reviled "chance."[1] In a similar spirit of willingness to enlist in an unpopular cause, I wish to say a good word on behalf of this much reviled metaphysics. Specifically, I wish to argue that Søren Kierkegaard was not an enemy of metaphysics. Rather, Kierkegaard's aim was to show that those metaphysical questions that are linked to religious faith are real questions that human beings must answer. They are, however, as Kant had argued already, questions that cannot be answered from a theoretical or speculative point of view, but that need to be approached from a point of view that could be called practical, pragmatic, or existential.

There Is Metaphysics and There Is Metaphysics

Before defending metaphysics, it is first necessary to clarify what I shall here mean by the term. The word is used by both friends and opponents for quite a variety of enterprises. There is, of course, the contemporary "bookstore" sense, in which metaphysics is associated with magic, witchcraft, and the occult. This usage we can safely ignore. Metaphysics is sometimes characterized in terms of its intended object of inquiry. Perhaps the most central designation of metaphysics would go back to Aristotle, in which metaphysics is that which "comes after physics." But what does it mean to go "after" or "beyond" physics? One answer would take metaphysics as an attempt to go beyond the limits of human experience; here metaphysics is the science of the transcendent or the supra-sensible. If there are Objective Forms or Transcendent Egos, metaphysics would be the science of such objects. A second sense, which may partially overlap this first one, gives metaphysics the role of inquiry into the supernatural. Metaphysics here is the quest for God, angels, and/or demons. This second sense should not be identified with the first, since doing so would prejudge the question as to whether experience of the supernatural is possible.

Alternatively, metaphysics is sometimes characterized in terms of a quest for a complete understanding of the whole of reality. The metaphysician on this view has no special region of reality to study, but is embarked on a quest for a "metanarrative," an account of the whole of reality in which science, morality, art and religion all have their place. (Though one should note that the term "metanarrative" itself is used in more than one way.) A variation on this quest to understand the whole would be what some philosophers term "ontology," which is a reflection on the "meaning of being" rather than an attempt to understand beings, whether that attempt be local or global. Less ambitious than the quest to understand the whole would be local or "regional" narratives, in which the metaphysician attempts to understand holistically some particular area of reality, such as the nature of human beings, or of the cosmos.

Still another way of categorizing metaphysics focuses on its presumed epistemic status, rather than on the object of study. A metaphysician may be seen as attempting to gain a certain kind of knowledge, knowledge that is universal or necessary or has some other special character. For example, the metaphysician may be described, as Kant often does, as the alleged purveyor of synthetic a priori truth, or in Spinozist form as the devotee of a strict method of rational proof that is supposed to guarantee certain knowledge. Hegel's view of philosophy as a quest for absolute knowledge that is arrived

at by a dialectical method would be yet another variation on this theme. My own hunch is that it is this epistemic characterization of metaphysics that is responsible for much of its current bad reputation.

I think it is pretty clear that there is such a thing as thinking about the character of the real that does not necessarily include such grandiose epistemological baggage. If one looks at metaphysical debates in contemporary analytic philosophy, for example, one finds a plurality of views on such topics as the nature of personal identity, the relation of mind to body, the nature and causes of human action, and many others. Rival views on all these issues are vigorously defended. In these debates none of the participants is under any illusion of saying the last word on the subject; rather, theories are developed and arguments defended with a full understanding that there are alternative views in the neighborhood and that no particular theory is likely to win universal (or even majority) assent. The arguments take the form of showing consistency or inconsistency with various convictions and commitments people have; a metaphysical view under attack by arguments, even powerful arguments, can always be saved if one is willing to modify some of those convictions. So it is clearly possible for there to be such a thing as metaphysical inquiry, thinking about the character of reality or some region of reality, that does not presume to be some kind of super science or absolute knowledge. We might call this simple form of metaphysics "mere metaphysics," or metaphysics in the narrow sense.

I wish therefore to distinguish between metaphysics that presumes to be *absolute knowledge* or claims some other kind of grand epistemological status because it promises a kind of certainty and finality, and the more modest kind of metaphysics. Mere metaphysics I shall characterize as an attempt to *understand the implications of one's life commitments*. Of course it is not just any kind of understanding that is implied here; nor are all commitments of equal weight. The understanding in question does have, I believe, some of the characteristics of metaphysics as traditionally conceived. It is that kind of understanding that we describe as "deep" or "holistic" because it concerns how we understand our lives as a whole and the whole of the reality we find ourselves in, and it deals with issues that we consider specially important. I do want "commitments" here to be taken in a broad sense, including both theoretical and practical matters. We find ourselves convinced of various kinds of beliefs which are enmeshed in patterns of life from which we would find it difficult to extricate ourselves.

It is, I think, metaphysics in the first sense, metaphysics as the claim to final and certain knowledge, that is usually what those who think of

Kierkegaard as an opponent of metaphysics have in mind. Michael Weston, for example, characterizes metaphysics in the following manner:

> Plato and Hegel mark the beginning and culmination of a particular project of human thought, metaphysics, which, for Kierkegaard, in its claim to reveal the truth of human existence represents a misunderstanding, and in its character as a human enterprise, expresses a deficient mode of human life.[2]

What is it about Plato and Hegel that offends Kierkegaard? Is it that they presume to direct human thought beyond the realm of the empirically knowable, to the transcendent? Hardly. Kierkegaard is no positivist. Is it that Plato and Hegel seek to give a coherent interpretation of the whole of experience? I think Kierkegaard has nothing against coherence and wholeness as *desiderata*. One of his first books was a blast at Hans Christian Andersen for *lacking* a coherent life-view, in Kierkegaard's eyes an essential trait for an author.[3] The problem with Plato, and especially with Hegel, lies rather in claims to finality or completeness. As Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus expresses it, "System and finality are pretty much one and the same, so that if the system is not finished, there is no system" (CUP 1:107). Climacus goes on to reinforce this point by comparing systems to pantheism. Pantheistic systems are often attacked with the charge that they undermine freedom and the distinction between good and evil. Climacus argues, however, that it is just as true to say that every *system* must be pantheistic, just because of the claim to finality (1:122).

This kind of systematic metaphysics for Kierkegaard constitutes that brand of speculative philosophy which aims to achieve the chimerical standpoint of "pure thought" (CUP 1:304–9, 313–14). Yet I do not think Kierkegaard's polemics against speculative philosophy are an indictment of metaphysical speculation per se, but rather constitute a vehement rejection of Hegelianism and other modern philosophies that aim at absolute knowledge.

Kierkegaard consistently expresses admiration for ancient philosophy, and he is well aware of its speculative character.[4] I believe that his admiration for this kind of metaphysics is grounded in two characteristics: (1) Ancient philosophers were aware of the speculative character of their thought; speculation was understood as speculation, not passed off as the system. (2) Ancient speculation was linked to practical questions; the Stoics and Epicureans developed theories about reality that were linked to visions of the good life. (For that matter, the Skeptic who rejects such metaphysical speculation is also viewed by Kierkegaard in a positive light, not merely for his epistemic modesty, but because his skepticism was put to practical use.)

Mere metaphysics is simply thinking about the nature of things without the epistemological burden of the claim to reach finality and certainty. The kind of thinking I have in mind is beautifully exemplified by William James in his classic essay "The Dilemma of Determinism." (I cite James as my example partly because he has become a hero to Rorty and others who see James as rejecting metaphysics. I see James myself as providing a pragmatic criterion for resolving metaphysical disputes.) I have already noted how James chooses in this essay to designate his view by the ugly term "chance." His reasons for doing so are straightforward. One may quibble about the meaning of freedom and thus about whether an act is or is not free, but the question as to whether all acts are causally determined or whether there is an element of indeterminism in the universe is, says James, "a perfectly sharp one." Therefore, "the truth *must* lie with one side or the other, and its lying with one side makes the other false."[5] The dispute over chance or indeterminism "has nothing to do with this or that psychological detail. It is a quarrel altogether metaphysical."[6]

Although James thinks that this is a metaphysical dispute in which one side must be correct and the other incorrect, he claims that no empirical facts can settle the issue.[7] Any conceivable empirical outcome can be understood, at least in retrospect, as the outcome of a deterministic process but also as one alternative outcome where there were other possibilities. Nevertheless, this theoretical impasse is not the end of the discussion. James proceeds to argue vigorously that in so far as we are committed to *regret* as a real and appropriate element in human life—we are committed to the denial of determinism. James even argues that those who say we should regret nothing are in the awkward position of regretting all the regret in the world. A clear understanding of what we might term our actual life-commitments, in this case a commitment to seeing regrets as sometimes appropriate, helps us see that it is reasonable to commit ourselves to one side of the metaphysical dispute.

It is metaphysics in this Jamesian sense that I wish to defend in this essay. There is no hint here of finality and certainty, no claim to absolute knowledge but rather a confession that theoretical evidence is not decisive. However, James does not see this lack of absolute knowledge as a barrier to serious consideration of metaphysical questions or to earnest conviction that certain positions on these questions are true.

Kant's View of Metaphysics

Kant bears, I think, a large measure of responsibility for the entanglement of metaphysical thinking with the grandiose epistemological project. Kant's

philosophy is a curious blend of epistemic humility and *hubris*. On the one hand he is much concerned with recognizing and accepting the limits of human reason. On the other hand, the reason that is supposed to be doing the critical assessment of reason's power seems to have few limits. Kant tells us that, having solved Hume's problem, "not merely in a particular case, but with respect to the whole faculty of pure reason," that he "could proceed safely, though slowly, to determine the whole sphere of pure reason completely and from universal principles." In this way, metaphysics could be constructed "as a system."[8] Thus, although Kant judges that metaphysics as a "science of the transcendent" does not really exist, he thinks that his own critical science does achieve the finality and certainty required for science.

This same paradoxical oscillation between skeptical caution and overweening confidence seems to shape Kant's use of the term "metaphysics." Kant speaks of metaphysics in several distinct senses. At times metaphysics seems to be a pseudoscience that Kant's critical philosophy has exposed. Thus Kant tells us that "all metaphysicians are therefore solemnly and legally suspended from their occupations" until they can answer the question as to how synthetic a priori cognition is possible.[9] Since Kant's challenge has not been met, "there is, as yet, no such thing as metaphysics."[10] At other times, metaphysics seems to be a name for Kant's own critical enterprise. That is, at times metaphysics seems to be an enterprise that *they* (the metaphysicians) try to carry out, but at other times Kant seems to see his own critical inquiry as a kind of science" hat is perhaps to be the new metaphysics, the successor science to the failed transcendent kind of metaphysics. For example, he claims that the distinction he has drawn between the "ideas of reason" and the pure concepts of the understanding "is so important in founding a science which is to contain the system of all these a priori cognitions that, without this distinction, metaphysics is absolutely impossible."[11] Here metaphysics seems to be what Kant himself is doing, or at least he sees what he is doing as providing a foundation for the new kind of metaphysics.

Despite the limitations of reason that Kant wishes to emphasize, Kant has a lot of faith in reason as having the ability to give a final critique of the powers of the human mind. He thinks he has successfully carried out the project of constructing a metaphysics in the second sense, or at least that he has provided all the essential conditions for doing so:

> Pure reason is, indeed, so perfect a unity that if its principles were insufficient for the solution of even a single one of all the questions to which it itself gives birth we should have no alternative but to reject the principle, since we should then no longer be able to place implicit reliance upon it in dealing with any of the other questions.[12]

On his view, reason should be able to treat questions about the powers of the human intellect with both completeness and finality. Hence Kant informs us that he has made completeness his chief aim, and he ventures "to assert that there is not a single metaphysical problem which has not been solved, or for the solution of which the key at least has not been supplied."[13]

I think that this "critical" metaphysical project of Kant carries with it the same kind of claim to finality and certainty that Kierkegaard rejects when he ridicules the system that is not quite finished. On this key point Kant stands with Hegel against Kierkegaard. So if we are to see a parallel between Kierkegaard's own metaphysics and Kant, we must look at another side of Kant.

And of course that side is present. Besides speaking of metaphysics as failed pseudoscience of the transcendent and as successful critique of the powers of human reason, Kant sometimes speaks of metaphysics in a third sense, as an enterprise that is closely linked to practical reason. In speaking of those philosophers who seek an understanding of ultimate reality, Kant says the following:

> If they [metaphysicians] . . . desire to carry on their business, not as a science, but as an art of wholesome persuasion suitable to the common sense of man, this calling cannot in justice be denied them. They will then speak the modest language of a rational belief; . . . to assume (not for speculative use, which they must abandon, but for practical use only) the existence of something possible and even indispensable for the guidance of the understanding and of the will in life.[14]

Such a description of course corresponds very closely with Kant's own attempts in the *Critique of Practical Reason* to show that rational faith in human freedom, God, and immortality is justified on practical grounds.

What kind of attitude does Kant have in mind when he speaks of this kind of "rational belief"? Philosophers have of course sometimes thought that the attitude in question was less than full-fledged belief in propositions with determinate meaning. Roger Scruton makes Kant into a kind of protopositivist: "It is a striking conclusion of Kant's thought that rational theology is not just unbelievable, but unthinkable."[15] If the content of theology is not only theoretically unknowable, but unthinkable, then belief in the ordinary sense would seem to be impossible.

This claim of Scruton's is quite mistaken, however. It is true that Kant says that the ideas of reason, since they are divorced from any possible experience, are ideas of which we have "no concept."[16] Yet here Kant is using the term "concept" as a technical term; he means "a concept that allows of being exhibited and intuited in a possible experience."[17] He certainly does not

mean that we cannot think about God, freedom, and immortality as theoretical possibilities. His view is rather that reason cannot avoid thinking about these things.[18] And this is a good thing too, since if "reason is denied the right of being the first to speak of things which concern supersensuous objects, such as the existence of God and the future world, a wide gate is opened to fanaticism, superstition, and even atheistic opinions."[19]

It is vitally important for Kant that the ideas that metaphysicians strive fruitlessly to gain knowledge about are thinkable. First, as in the quote above, this rational determination of the ideas is a hindrance to superstition. Secondly, the ideas turn out to have what Kant calls a regulative use even within the sphere of theoretical thought.[20] But most importantly, the fact that we have these ideas leaves open the possibility that belief in them may be justified on practical grounds:

> For if, in some other relation, perhaps on practical grounds, the presupposition of a supreme and all-sufficient being, as highest intelligence, established its validity beyond all question, it would be of the greatest importance accurately to determine this concept on its transcendental side.[21]

It would be a great mistake then to take Kant's "rational belief" as acceptance of metaphysical ideas that are "useful fictions," a simple determination to think and act *as if* God, freedom and immortality were realities.[22] It is true that Kant continuously denies that belief in these realities can be theoretical in character (except as "regulative ideas"), but he means by this that the ideas in question have no value as scientific explanations. Kant wants to claim that when individuals act practically, they find themselves rationally compelled to believe in the reality of these ideas. To think of them simply as useful fictions would undermine the actions that require us to have the beliefs in question. Because rational belief is a form of belief, it is vital that the ideas believed have genuine theoretical content.

Kierkegaard and Antirealism

Does Kierkegaard share this attitude of Kant towards metaphysics? Many contemporary writers, both among scholars and among those who write for a broader audience, see Kierkegaard as an "antirealist" who has no concern for the objective truth of propositions. Don Cupitt, for example, a theologian whose writings have been much discussed, particularly in the UK, says that Kierkegaard presents contradictory views of God, but that Kierkegaard is unconcerned about the contradictions because he has no concern for the

objective correctness of views of God. "[T]o suppose that our various images of God can be checked for their accuracy against an independently-known Original in order to harmonize them and remove their mutual inconsistencies is to fall into the absurd and impious fancies of objectifying dogmatic theology."[23]

There are a number of passages in *Postscript* which can be taken as suggesting an antirealist view of God, in which God is not regarded as an objective reality existing independently of human consciousness, but as in some way "constituted" by subjectivity.[24] Here is one such passage: "But freedom, that is the wondrous lamp. When a person rubs it with ethical passion, then God comes into existence for him" (CUP 1:138).

How can God "come into existence" for a person? One might think that a being who could come into or pass out of existence could not possibly be God. However, this is not so if one thinks of "God" as a symbol or projection of some human ideal, and the following passage might be thought to suggest such a view of God:

> For God is not something outward, like a wife, whom I can ask whether she is now satisfied with me. . . . because God is not some outward thing, but is the infinite itself, is not something outward that quarrels with me when I do wrong but the infinite itself that does not need scolding words, but whose vengeance is terrible—the vengeance that God does not exist for me at all, even though I pray. (CUP 1:162–63)

One might construe this fairly obscure passage as meaning that awareness of God's reality is simply awareness of some infinite "idea" in consciousness, perhaps consciousness of an infinite moral demand, which has no existence independently of consciousness. On this reading, belief in God would be something rather like belief in an absolute moral standard, and while such a standard could be seen platonically as an objective reality, it could also be seen as a kind of subjective ideal to which a person is committed, an ideal that has no ontological status other than that of a possibility to be lived.

The question as to whether Kierkegaard is a realist or an antirealist clearly hinges partly on how we define the terms "realism" and "antirealism." Cupitt seems to think that a realist is someone who claims to have a kind of unmediated access to Reality, an access that implies the possession of truth that is final and certain. Thus Kierkegaard for him is not a realist because Kierkegaard does not admit that we humans have a special access to God as "an independently known original," an access that would provide some kind of absolute knowledge by which to measure the adequacy of various human conceptions. Realism here is tied to what is often termed

classical foundationalism in epistemology. Cupitt is hardly alone in thinking about realism in this way. Richard Rorty, for example, often describes realism as presupposing or entailing a claim that human beings have some kind of faculty that gives them certain access to Truth about Reality. It is for this reason, I think, that Rorty seems to think of Kierkegaard as someone who is on his side in the realism debate, when he identifies Kierkegaard as one who rejects the Socratic assumption that humans have a timeless "truth-tracking faculty called Reason" in favor of the view that the point of departure of human knowers may simply be a contingent historical event.[25] As Rorty sees it, since Kierkegaard denied we have any special access to Reality, Kierkegaard is not a realist.

If realism is equated with the Cartesian project of providing absolute foundations for knowledge, a project that certainly has been dominant in modern philosophy, then there is no question that Kierkegaard is not a realist. However, there are other conceptions of realism that do not coincide with this one. Hilary Putnam and William Alston, for example, while disagreeing about the truth of realism, agree on how it should be defined: "[A] distinguishing feature of the realistic sense of 'true' is it is logically possible for even the best attested statement to be false."[26]

The realist in this sense wishes to stress that reality is, with the exception of human beings and those actions and creations and institutions obviously dependent on human activity, independent of the human mind. The realist in this sense defines herself over against any "verificationist" theory that insists that truth and reality be defined in terms of what we humans can know or experience. Far from being an epistemological absolutist, realism in this sense is logically tied to epistemological humility, since its defining feature is the claim that reality is not limited by our human cognitive powers and thus may always exceed those powers. Of course such a reality *may* be knowable by humans; the point of realism is that we have no guarantees. We cannot say with Peirce that truth is what an ideal community of human investigators will ultimately agree on, since it is possible for even the best human scientific community to get things wrong.

I believe that this second characterization of realism is by far the most helpful and fruitful. For the kind of view Rorty presents seems to imply that we have only two options: either claim unmediated access to Reality that gives us final truth or else admit that there is no such thing as objective truth about the real. But surely there are options in between these two extremes. We might, for example, hold that there is such an objective final truth, but also hold that for finite human beings, such a truth can only be an ideal to be approximated and striven for. We might hold that of those strivings and

approximations, some are better than others without claiming that we say this because we have some kind of final access to the truth.

I believe that this last attitude I have sketched is precisely Kierkegaard's view. One of the most famous passages from *Postscript* claims that "existence itself is a system—for God" (CUP 1:118). It is true that Johannes Climacus strenuously maintains that existence cannot be a system for human beings, unfinished strivers that we are. Perhaps someone like Rorty will then wonder about the value of such a final truth, since it is inaccessible to existing human beings. The answer is that such a final truth is valuable partly because it gives us existing human beings something to strive for. Even if we humans can never fully realize such final truth, if there were no such thing as the truth as God sees it, then there would be nothing for us to strive for or approximate.

Nor does Kierkegaard ever affirm that all of our efforts as knowers are equally far off the mark. The discussion in *Postscript* about objective truth in the section on truth as subjectivity certainly does not dismiss the idea of objective truth. It rather claims that for us existing human beings, such truth can only be an *approximation* (CUP 1:189). But without the standard of truth as reality as God knows it, there would be nothing to approximate. We strive to get it right and tell it like it is, even if our best efforts are always fallible, subject to correction, and partially off the mark. But such striving would look very different—it could not be thought of in the same way—if there were no such thing as getting it right.

This claim may seem excessive. Surely, one might think, we can judge some beliefs superior to others without presupposing some final standard, just as we can judge a philosophy paper to be superior to another without assuming some absolute standard of comparison.[27] In general we certainly can and do judge various things to be comparatively better and worse without presupposing any absolute standard. There is no such thing as the absolute best philosophy paper, and no such thing as the absolute best amount of money, yet we judge paper A better than paper B, and (at least in some situations) we judge it better to have money than to lack it.

In some cases, however, our ability to rank and evaluate does seem to rest on some kind of final standard. In these cases there seems to be a kind of maximum degree of perfection that serves as a basis for the comparison. There are activities that have a natural goal, and this goal sets the standard. In archery, the shot closest to the center wins. In mathematics, when two sets of lines are compared, one set can be judged more equal than the other because there is a standard of equality.

I believe that truth is such a standard, and that believing is an activity where there is a natural goal. Truth is certainly not the only goal we have for

our beliefs, and thus is not the only way we evaluate them. Beliefs can be better and worse in all sorts of ways. When we say, however, that a belief is more true, we mean to say that it comes closer to getting it right, telling it like it is. That is why truth is ultimately not reducible to epistemic concepts. When a belief is true, it is made true by the way the world is, not by the fact that human beings have achieved consensus about it, or that it is an intellectually fertile way to think about things. At least that is what we think when we are trying to find the truth, and it is the way Kierkegaard thinks about propositional truth as well.

The Kierkegaardian claim that truth is subjectivity does not undermine this commitment to realism. First of all, this famous claim by Johannes Climacus is limited to what he calls moral and religious truth, and is not meant to apply to truth in general (CUP 1:199n). But more important, the focus of the discussion is not on the nature of objective propositional truth at all, but on the question as to what makes a person's life true:

> *When truth is asked about objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself. What is reflected upon is not the relation but that it is the truth, the true, to which the knower relates. If that to which he relates himself simply is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth. When the truth is asked about subjectively, the individual's relation is reflected upon subjectively. If this relation's how is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he thereby relates himself to untruth* (CUP 1:199; italics in original).

This passage, so far from denying that there is such a thing as objective truth, clearly presupposes that there is such a thing. The question is whether or not having a relation to that objective truth suffices to make the individual's life true, and the claim is that it does not. Climacus maintains rather that if the individual is related in the proper manner to what the individual perceives as true, the individual will be living truly even though the individual is related to what is objectively false. This claim may be vulnerable to criticism in a number of ways; some may think Climacus naive to believe that the manner in which an individual appropriates what he or she perceives as truth is sufficient to make the individual's life true, though I shall argue below that his view is defensible in the proper metaphysical context. In any case, it is not a denial that there is such a thing as objective truth, and it does not imply that this propositional truth should not be understood in a realistic manner.

The realistic character of Kierkegaard's thought comes through most strongly in the emphasis on risk and objective uncertainty. Climacus argues time and time again that religious faith is a passion and that this passion, far

from being incompatible with objective uncertainty, thrives on such uncertainty, even demands it. However, the uncertainty and risk that passion craves is logically linked to the realistic interpretation of truth as that which even the best human cognitive efforts may miss.

Kierkegaard on Knowing God

I believe that those who tie realism to classical foundationalist epistemology typically reason as follows: it is pointless to claim that there is objective truth if we human beings have no access to that truth. Nelson Goodman, for example, while not denying outright the existence of an objective, independent reality, suggests that this is a claim not worth making: "[W]hile the underlying world . . . need not be denied to those who love it, it is perhaps on the whole a world well lost."[28] Those who think this way believe, as does Richard Rorty, that one must choose between truth as "contact with Reality" and truth as edifying or "what is good for us to believe."[29]

Kierkegaard rejects this dilemma, because he rejects the underlying premise on which it rests, a premise that is held in common by the classical foundationalist and the contemporary antirealist. The premise in question is a conditional proposition: "*If* there is knowledge of objective reality, there must be some way in which certain and final knowledge about that reality can be obtained." The classical foundationalist accepts this principle and goes on to argue that since there is knowledge, there must be access to reality that provides us with foundational absolute knowledge. The contemporary antirealist argues that since there is no such absolute foundational knowledge, there is no such thing as knowledge of objective reality. If we couple this claim with some kind of commitment to verificationism (taken in a broad sense), then the very notion of an objective reality becomes dubious and even meaningless.

Kierkegaard, however, rejects this conditional premise. On his view, empirical knowledge necessarily aims at such objective knowledge, even though there is no such thing as an "absolute given" nor any "absolute method" guaranteed to lead to final knowledge. There is neither unmediated nor mediated absolute knowledge, but the whole enterprise of knowing loses its point if we cease to think of it as a quest for knowledge of reality as it is. Rather, he assumes, in a commonsense manner, that knowledge is an attempt to find out how things really are, independently of the knower. For example, in arguing against the Hegelian view that the past can be understood as necessary, Johannes Climacus claims that historical events are contingent events and that knowledge of the historical as necessary would not be

genuine knowledge, since it would involve a change in what is known: "If what is apprehended is changed by apprehension, then the apprehension is changed into a misunderstanding" (PF 79–80).

Nevertheless, one might think that even if Kierkegaard is a realist with respect to ordinary empirical knowledge, he is not a realist with respect to religious knowledge. To see whether or not this is so, let us examine the case of knowledge of God. If Kierkegaard accepted the conditional premise specified above, he would certainly reject any realistic account of God, for he clearly rejects the claim that any knowledge of God that is objectively certain can be had, whether immediate or mediate. The claim that one can have a direct and unmediated experience of God is stigmatized as paganism (CUP 1:243–45, 600), and one of the most famous sections of *Philosophical Fragments* argues that no logical arguments for the existence of God can be conclusive (37–44).

It does not follow from these denials, however, that God cannot be known at all. It certainly does not follow that one's beliefs about God cannot be beliefs about a God who has a reality independent of human thinking. At least these implications do not follow if one rejects the conditional claim that knowledge of objective reality depends on absolute foundational knowledge of that reality. Johannes Climacus does not think of God merely as a set of subjective possibilities. He sees God as in fact present in or behind the natural world. Yet God's presence cannot be discerned *directly* through "objective reflection" or "objective data" but can only be grasped through spiritual inwardness. Climacus says that nature is God's work, but God is not directly present in nature. Nevertheless, "inside the individual there is a possibility . . . that an inwardness is awakened to a God-relationship, and then it is possible to see God everywhere" (CUP 1:246–47).

So despite the polemic against direct or immediate awareness of God, Climacus does not wish to deny that an individual can become aware of God. He simply wants to maintain that such awareness is only made possible by what he calls inwardness or subjectivity. One of his major criticisms of objective proofs of God's existence is that they make what should be certain (to the spiritually developed person) appear to be doubtful:

> For to demonstrate the existence of one who is present is the most shameless affront, since it is an attempt to make him ridiculous, . . . How could it occur to one to demonstrate that he exists, unless it is because one has first permitted oneself to ignore him; and now one makes the matter still more crazy by demonstrating his existence before his very nose? A king's existence or his presence generally has its own characteristic expression of subjection and submission; what if one in his sublime presence wanted to

> prove that he existed? Would one then prove it? No, one makes a fool of him, for his presence is demonstrated by an expression of submission . . . and thus one also demonstrates God's existence by worship—not by proofs. (CUP 1:545)

Of course Climacus does not mean that worship constitutes objective evidence or a logical proof of God's existence. In this passage the individual who has failed to develop herself spiritually so as to become aware of God's reality is portrayed as spiritually lazy or absentminded, ignoring a God who can be experientially present. However, it ought to be clear that this does not imply that God's presence is obvious or immediate. The person who "ignores" God's presence is simply the person who fails to develop those moral and religious capacities that are the ground of the awareness of God.

So Kierkegaard's claim is twofold: (1) God's reality is both objectively uncertain in the sense that the truth of the claim that God exists cannot be settled by detached contemplation or immediately certain experiential data. (2) This same God's reality can be subjectively certain in the sense that a person who is spiritually developed can be aware of God's reality and even have a kind of confidence about that reality. How can the reality of God be both uncertain and certain in this way for the same individual?

Kierkegaard's answer is that this is the very nature of faith or belief. Human beliefs in general are objectively uncertain once we go beyond logical truths and truths about how reality immediately appears to us (PF 81–84). Faith or belief is simply the human capacity to resolve this objective uncertainty and arrive at a conviction (84). There is a special kind of uncertainty involved in belief in the incarnation, an uncertainty that requires faith in a special or "eminent" sense (86–88). That special kind of faith should not obscure the fact that faith in general is simply the human ability to arrive at conviction about what appears objectively uncertain. There is what we might call "Socratic faith," a faith in God's reality grounded in general human moral and religious experience, and this faith shares in the general character of faith.

Kierkegaard's view here is not at all strange or bizarre when we turn our attention away from the modern philosophical tradition and look at actual human life. All of us do have some convictions, convictions that may have great strength, and yet we understand that for other people who do not share the values and assumptions we bring to bear on the consideration of those convictions, the beliefs in question may appear uncertain or even plainly false. I am personally absolutely convinced that during the Reagan-Bush (#1) administration the status of the poor in the United States was severely damaged and the middle class severely weakened. My confidence in those

beliefs is not appreciably weakened by my knowledge that those who approach the economic data with a certain set of conservative assumptions find my beliefs dubious. In a similar manner a person of faith understands that the lack of faith makes religious convictions seem dubious; nevertheless, if I am a person of faith, such convictions do not seem dubious to me.

But note that the recognition of the "subjective" grounds of the belief in no way entails that the *content* of the belief must be subjective. My conviction about the conditions of the poor and the middle class in the Reagan-Bush administration is a conviction about how things really were and are. My conviction about God is similarly a conviction about how things are. The objective content of the belief is determined by the nature of belief itself; it does not rest on or presuppose any special method that guarantees infallible access to the final truth. I could be wrong about Reagan, and I could be wrong about God. I could protect myself against a certain kind of risk by transforming my belief about how things are into a belief about my own future possibilities for action. However, Kierkegaard says that this kind of evasion of risk is an evasion of our finitude and historicity. We cannot escape the possibility that we are wrong, and should not try to do so, but that does not mean we cannot stake our lives around our convictions as to how things are.

Why Kierkegaard Thinks Belief in God Must Be Rooted in Subjectivity

I think many readers of Kierkegaard err by projecting on to him a particular intellectual crisis that has been acutely felt by many thinkers in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is a crisis that concerns the intellectual viability of traditional theistic religious beliefs. Most modern thinkers have accepted some form of "evidentialism," in which a belief is justified only if it is held on the basis of sufficient evidence, evidence that is supposed to be objective in the sense of being certain and available to anyone. To many intellectuals, traditional religious beliefs are lacking when measured by this evidentialist standard. The traditional proofs do not work, and appeals to religious experience or to revelation do not offer the kind of evidence needed. In this situation it appears necessary either to reject religious truth claims or reinterpret them in a nonrealistic fashion. Those who do not wish to reject the religious life entirely see themselves as having no alternative but to reinterpret that life. Having made the best of the situation, they may then try to put a favorable spin on the outcome by arguing that the nonrealistic reading is better anyway, for religious reasons.[30]

It is natural enough for thinkers in the above situation to assume that Kierkegaard is addressing the same set of issues, despite the fact that he is not. It is not that Kierkegaard thinks that the theistic arguments can be rehabilitated, or that claims to experience God can be scientifically certified. Rather, the difference lies in the attitude towards the underlying assumption of evidentialism. Kierkegaard, along with such contemporary proponents of Reformed Epistemology as Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff and William Alston, rejects the idea that belief in God must be grounded in objective evidence, the kind of evidence called for by the epistemologies of classical foundationalism.[31]

Kierkegaard's turn to subjectivity is not motivated by the historical claim that theism was once intellectually credible but is so no longer. If the "modern age" finds it more difficult to believe in God, from Kierkegaard's point of view this is due to spiritual deadness on the part of modern people. It is not that earlier people were more credible and modern people have higher intellectual standards. The claim that unbelief is due to a lack of intellectual evidence is for him simply part of the self-deception of the modern age, which would like to disguise its rebelliousness and insubordination as intellectual honesty.

For Kierkegaard, subjectivity is no second-best fallback position with respect to religious knowledge. It is the ground of all genuine religious knowledge in all times. Even in the times when objective proofs were regarded as successful, it was faith that supported the proofs, and not the proofs that supported the faith.[32] The reasons why Kierkegaard thinks that religious knowledge must be grounded in subjectivity have nothing to do with the limitations of theistic arguments; it is not the case that religious faith would suddenly become intellectually more respectable if a new version of the teleological argument were to be constructed that would be rooted in the latest findings of biology. Rather, religious knowledge is linked to subjectivity because there is an essential link between the attainment of religious insight and the development of religious character.

For Kierkegaard, if religious beliefs were purely theoretical in character, then there would be no essential link between recognizing the truth and becoming a different kind of person. Because God is a God of goodness and holiness, and because God desires his human creatures to develop these same qualities, he has designed the world in such a way that those creatures can only come to know him if they are engaged in the struggle to become like him. Ultimately, then, for Kierkegaard the claim that the knowledge of God is grounded in subjectivity is itself grounded in a traditional picture of God as the Creator who has created a world with a particular structure.

If one thinks, as Kierkegaard clearly does, that the knowledge of God is essential for a full human life, and if one thinks, as Kierkegaard also does, that God loves all his creatures and wants them all to enjoy that knowledge, then linking the knowledge of God to subjectivity makes sense. Human beings differ markedly in their intellectual abilities and in their educational opportunities. Every normal human being, however, is faced with responsible choices about the character of existence. Every normal human being struggles with guilt and personal responsibility and the development or failure of relationships with others. If the knowledge of God is grounded in these experiences, and if it depends essentially on the honesty and courage with which people face the issue of who they are and how they should live their lives, then that knowledge is in principle available to all. It is certainly not limited to those who are philosophical theologians. But this picture of religious knowledge as linked to subjectivity rests on beliefs about the character and intentions of a God who is really there and who created humans to enjoy communion with him.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, Kierkegaard thinks that the question of how a person arrives at a belief overshadows the question of what beliefs a person holds. This apparently opens him up to the criticism that a sincere Nazi who passionately embraces his beliefs is "in the truth." If my account is right, however, Kierkegaard may have an answer to this charge. His position is ultimately not that what a person believes is unimportant. Having the right beliefs is important, but a person will only reach the right beliefs if that person is seeking in the right way.

> In all the usual talk that Johannes Climacus is mere subjectivity etc., it has been completely overlooked that in addition to all his other concretions, he points out in one of the last sections that the remarkable thing is that there is a How with the characteristic that when the How is scrupulously rendered the What is also given, that this is the How of "faith." (JP 4, entry 4550)

One does not necessarily become the right kind of person merely by having the right beliefs; in fact, the beliefs cannot even be right in an important sense if they are not held in the right way. This is so, not because the beliefs themselves lack objective content or are unimportant, but because God has ordained that it will be this way:

> But truly, just as little as God allows a type of fish to come into existence in a particular lake without ensuring that the plant that is its nourishment also grows there, just so little will God allow the person who is in truth concerned to be ignorant of what he should believe. . . . The need brings

> with it the nourishment, not by itself, as if the need produced the nourishment, but by virtue of God's ordinance that joins the two, the need and the nourishment, together. Therefore, if one says this is so, one must add "as sure as there is a God"; for if God did not exist, then neither would this be as it is. (CD 244–45)

This claim itself must of course be believed in faith. Its truth is by no means obvious experientially, and the committed Christian cannot see how it can be completely true in this life. However, that committed Christian will not see this life as the whole of human existence, and this belief in the life to come will once more be understood as belief about what is the case.

Chapter 4

The Role of Irony in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*

Many authors, beginning with Kierkegaard himself, have seen the writings attributed by Kierkegaard to the Johannes Climacus pseudonym as having a central place in the Kierkegaardian authorship. In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* Kierkegaard says that *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is "the turning point in the whole authorship" (PV 55). To signal its special place in the authorship as a book that is, strictly speaking, neither esthetic nor religious, Kierkegaard says that it had to be attributed to a pseudonym, "although I did put my name on it as editor, something I have not done with any purely aesthetic production—a hint, at least for someone who is concerned with or has a sense for that kind of thing" (31–32). Of course, *Postscript* is a postscript to *Philosophical Fragments*, albeit a rather long-winded one, and since Kierkegaard had already placed his name on that earlier volume as "editor," we are probably safe in assuming that the same kind of "hint" is being offered in the case of *Fragments* as with *Postscript*.

But what kind of hint is being offered? There is a long tradition of reading *Fragments* and *Postscript* as Kierkegaard's definitive treatments of theological and philosophical topics. This tradition has recently been criticized by literary-minded commentators, who argue that to read Kierkegaard "straight" as a philosopher/theologian is to misunderstand him. Roger Poole, for example, criticizes what he calls the tradition of "blunt reading" of Kierkegaard in North America.[1] Poole attempts to explain this blunt reading as due to the fact that the first two prominent interpreters of Kierkegaard in North America were Walter Lowrie and David Swenson. Lowrie, according

to Poole, was a retired minister with a "plain, honest mind," and Poole misidentifies David Swenson as a "professor of religion at the University of Minnesota."[2] Thus, Kierkegaard was initially seen in North America through religious eyes, and this "emplacement within theology is the reason why Kierkegaard was translated as he was, and also translated as an orthodox Christian believer, . . . in a manner that paid extraordinarily little attention to the contours of what Kierkegaard obsessively used to refer to as his 'indirect communication.' "[3]

In reality Swenson was a philosopher in one of the most secular departments and secular universities in the United States; there was no department of religion at the University of Minnesota at that time or even today.[4] However, this mistake on the part of Poole is probably not important, since he sees most philosophers as equally "blunt" as the theologians in their readings of Kierkegaard.[5] The real problem seems to be that philosophers and theologians have taken Kierkegaard to be offering claims or views on various issues, and even as supporting such claims with arguments. Poole claims that such an approach is doomed to failure, because "Kierkegaard's text does not offer itself to be the object of the question, 'What does it mean?' It offers itself as the proponent of the question 'What do you think?'"[6]

Now one might reasonably think that a false dilemma is here assumed and ask whether or not Kierkegaard's texts could inspire new thinking if they have no meaning of their own to which we could understand and respond. Poole, however, claims that such a question betrays a failure to understand that the Kierkegaardian texts "demonstrate to a nicety the Lacanian perception that all we are ever offered in a text is an endless succession of signifiers."[7] If we read Kierkegaard in this Lacanian way, we will see that "Kierkegaard writes text after text whose aim is not to state a truth, not to clarify an issue, not to propose a definite doctrine, not to offer some meaning that could be directly appropriated."[8]

To avoid blunt reading, commentators such as Poole stress that one must pay special attention to Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms and the role irony plays in the authorship. And quite a few writers have done so. James Conant, for example, has written a series of articles in which he compares Kierkegaard to Wittgenstein, arguing that the "Revocation" attached to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is formally analogous to the famous ending of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, in which Wittgenstein affirms that the content of the book is nonsense: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the latter after he has

climbed up it.)"[9] Conant argues that the Revocation attached to *Postscript* by Johannes Climacus functions in the same way as Wittgenstein's oracular "conclusion," identifying what has gone before in the book as "nonsense."[10] If irony as a rhetorical form consists in part in saying something entirely different from and even opposite of the surface meaning of the text, then on Conant's reading the Climacus writings are ironical through and through; the irony consists in the fact that the texts apparently express what is in fact inexpressible.[11] The real point of Kierkegaard according to Conant is that religious truth cannot be expressed but only lived, and the attempts on the part of Climacus to express this truth cannot help but be nonsensical. That generations of philosophers and theologians have read the works without perceiving the nonsense is itself what one might call a deep situational irony.

The tradition of taking Kierkegaard seriously as a philosopher and theologian is certainly not confined to North America, however, and Lowrie and Swenson hardly deserve all the blame (or credit) for this tradition. The late Niels Thulstrup surely provides an excellent example in his "Commentary" on *Fragments*. Consider, for example, Thulstrup's judgment on the question of the pseudonymity of *Fragments*: "The work is both thought and written in Kierkegaard's own name and therefore cannot be considered a truly pseudonymous work."[12] Since the work is not truly pseudonymous, Thulstrup feels free to regard the book as the one in which Kierkegaard gives "the outline of his dogmatics."[13] *Fragments* is seen as a book in which "Kierkegaard raises philosophical and Christian problems one after the other and gives his solutions, which open one's eyes to ever-widening perspectives."[14] Poole would surely judge Thulstrup's account of *Fragments* as an "outline of dogmatics" replete with "problems and solutions" to be blunt reading indeed.

In this chapter I want to argue that the literary scholars are quite right to call attention to the ironical character of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous literature, including the writings attributed to Johannes Climacus, but wrong to think that this implies that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings do not contain theological and philosophical claims and arguments. Specifically, irony plays a key role in *Philosophical Fragments*, and that book cannot properly be understood without paying attention to the specific standpoint of Johannes Climacus or the irony that pervades his authorial perspective. I shall claim, however, that paying attention to the pseudonymous and ironical character of the book does not require us to judge the book to be nonsense. Rather, the irony *presupposes* the validity of most of the distinctions and arguments it contains.

Johannes Climacus is a kind of philosopher, and paying attention to the literary character of *Fragments* by no means requires us to regard the book as having no serious philosophical and theological content. The complaint that such authors as Lowrie and Thulstrup effectively ignored the pseudonymous character of *Fragments* is partially valid. This failure on their part, however, does not mean that their writings, as well as those of many other authors who have thought of *Fragments* as serious philosophy, do not contain helpful insights into what is going on in the text.

The Ironical Character of *Fragments*

In *The Concept of Irony* Kierkegaard distinguishes two forms of irony: "The most common form of irony is to say something earnestly, which is not yet meant in earnest. The other form of irony, to say something in a jest, jestingly, that is meant in earnest appears more rarely" (248). I believe that *Philosophical Fragments* is an example of this second, rarer type of irony. To understand the book then requires us to see it as a jest, but at the same time to see that through the jest something serious is being said.

How can we recognize this? Indeed, how can we recognize a book as ironical at all? These are the questions that Wayne Booth attempts to answer in his magisterial *A Rhetoric of Irony*.[15] It is a fact, says Booth, that many authors employ irony successfully in that at least some readers come to understand the author's ironical intentions. It does not take too long for most readers to come to recognize that Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, which argues that the nineteenth-century surplus Irish population could be reduced by selling young Irish children for food, is highly ironical, despite or because of its tone of "mad reasonableness."[16] Nor does it take many readers very long to recognize that the cheery optimism of the narrator of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is very far from being the voice of the author.[17] The question then is not whether irony is recognizable, but how we perform the trick of recognizing it.

Booth discusses a whole host of ways we detect irony in an author. One obvious way is direct guidance from an author, looking at such things as an author's preface, a title, or an epigraph. Such direct guidance may or may not be helpful; we also look for such things as deliberate errors, disharmonies of style, and conflicts of belief within the text.[18] All of these tests are highly fallible. To detect a disharmony of style, we must have some sense of how we think the author himself would write if he or she were writing straightforwardly. Detecting a deliberate error of fact requires some sense of what the author believed to be true. Obviously, all of us make mistakes about this sort

of thing. We are particularly prone to being taken in by irony that is critically aimed at positions we ourselves hold dear.

I know a man who wrote a fictional story called "The Salvation of Zachary Baumkletterer," about a young man who starved himself to death while attempting to follow the moral teachings of those who stress the obligations of those who have resources to share what they have with the poor.[19] I know the author's political position well, and I believe that the story was ironical; the intended purpose was to satirize the position of those who claim that morality does not permit us to enjoy luxuries such as stylish clothes and automobiles in a world in which others are starving. Much to the author's surprise, however, some people took the tale of Zachary Baumkletterer as a story about a moral hero to be emulated. The irony is that the irony of the story was opaque to the people it was intended to satirize.

Booth argues that this sort of case can be generalized:

> Every reader will have the greatest difficulty detecting irony that mocks his own beliefs or characteristics. If an author invents a speaker whose stupidities strike me as gems of wisdom, how am I to know that he is not a prophet? If his mock style seems like good writing to me, what am I to do? And if his incongruities of fact and logic are such as I might commit, I am doomed.[20]

These are points to keep in mind as we think about how to detect irony in *Fragments*, and also about what sort of person is likely to miss the irony.

If I am right in my contention that the irony in *Fragments* is the kind in which something serious is said in the form of a jest, then detecting the irony could be difficult. Some of the tests that Booth proposes, such as incongruities of fact and logic, may not be present at all, and indeed there is a logical coherence to the "thought-experiment" of Johannes Climacus. As he says in the "Moral" to the book, the "project indisputably goes beyond the Socratic, as is made clear at every point" (PF 111). It is therefore vital that we have other kinds of clues. Fortunately, these are provided in abundance, in such a manner that the ironical character of *Fragments* can hardly be seriously doubted.

First and foremost we have direct assertions on the part of the author(s), both Kierkegaard and Climacus. In *Postscript* Climacus himself comments on a German review of *Fragments*:

> His summary is accurate and on the whole dialectically dependable, but now comes the hitch: although the summary is correct, anyone who reads only that will receive an absolutely wrong impression of the book. . . . The summary is didactic, purely and simply didactic; the reader will therefore

> get the impression that the pamphlet also is didactic. From my point of view, this is the most mistaken impression one can get of it. The contrast of form, the teasing resistance of the experiment to the content, the inventive shamelessness (which even invents Christianity), . . . the untiring activity of irony, the parody of speculative thought in the entire plan, the satire in making strenuous efforts as if something *ganz Auszerordentliches und zwar Neues* ["altogether extraordinary, that is, new"] were to come of them, whereas what continually emerges is old-fashioned orthodoxy in its rightful strictness: of all of this the reader finds no hint in the summary. (CUP 1:274n–75n)

Of course the reader may be on guard against this direct assertion on the part of Climacus. May not this claim be itself ironical, leaving the original text as straightforward prose? This is of course possible, but there is not the least hint of any such thing in the style or claims of the footnote where Climacus comments on his own earlier work.

In any case we do not have to rely simply on what Climacus says about *Fragments*. There is also a direct assertion by Kierkegaard himself in his *Journal*, in an entry from 1845:

> The review of my *Fragments* in the German journal is essentially wrong in making the content appear didactic, expository, instead of being experimental by virtue of its polar form, which is the very basis of the elasticity of irony. To make Christianity seem to be an invention of Johannes Climacus is a biting satire on philosophy's insolent attitude toward it. And then to bring out the orthodox forms in the experiment "so that our age, which only mediates etc., is scarcely able to recognize them" and believes it is something new—that is irony. But right there is the earnestness, to want Christianity to be given its due in this way—before one mediates. (JP, entry 5827 vol. 5, p. 284)

One could hardly expect a more direct claim of irony on the part of an author. Of course one can suspect Kierkegaard himself of being ironical here, but the suspicion is lessened by the fact that the claim is made in Kierkegaard's personal daybook. If this is ironical, who is the intended "victim" of the irony? Kierkegaard himself?

In any case the strong suspicion of irony that these claims support is greatly strengthened when we look at the text of *Philosophical Fragments* itself, which is liberally strewn with pointers toward its ironical character. We could focus on the title. In the world of Hegelian philosophy in which "philosophy" and "system" are pretty much synonymous, the title *Philosophiske Smuler* is itself highly ironical, since "scraps" or "bits" of philosophy could hardly be said to be philosophy. A full treatment would take account of the "Epigraph" from Shakespeare, and the "Preface" as well.[21]

The most prominent clues, however, are the dialogues with an Interlocutor who appears at the end of each chapter, and it is on these I want to focus attention. The Interlocutor, about whom more will be said later, appears at the end of each chapter, in a section usually beginning with something like "But perhaps someone will say" (PF 21–22, 35–36, 46–48, 53–54, 66–71, 89–90, 105–10). Several times this figure accuses Climacus of plagiarism, in that Climacus pretends to invent a perspective—which looks suspiciously like Christianity—on the Truth and how the Truth is to be learned. The Interlocutor compares Climacus to a man who charges a fee in the afternoon to see a grazing ram that could be seen by anyone in the morning for free (21). Climacus is said not only to be a plagiarizer but the "shabbiest of all plagiarizers," since the story he has told is one that is known by every child (35).

The accusation itself is not so interesting as is the response by Climacus, who unrepentantly confesses each time the charge is made, with words dripping with irony: "Maybe so, I hide my face in shame" (PF 21). In fact, Climacus is shameless, cheerfully admitting he has made allusions to authors without acknowledgment, arguing that his plagiarism is not as bad as others simply because it is so obvious and easily detected (PF 35, 53–54)! His "plagiarism" is of course essential to his point; his imagined "alternative" to the Socratic view of the Truth and how it is learned is simply the Christian orthodoxy that any catechized child would be familiar with. Every one of Climacus's implied readers will know that Christianity is a revealed religion that stands or falls with the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to be the incarnate Son of God who became human to deal with the problem of human sin. All of the readers of the book already know that Christianity claims that Jesus is not simply a teacher with a new philosophical doctrine, but the individual who was "the way, and the truth, and the life."[22]

The extended irony of *Fragments* should in fact be clear even without the intervention of the Interlocutor. It is hardly possible to miss the resemblance between the "invention" of Climacus and Christianity, and if anyone were so dense as not to see it, Climacus goes out of his way to make the point obvious by using many theologically loaded terms. Although he begins with philosophical language that might appear to fit his pseudo-invention, he quickly calls his hypothesized "Teacher" a "savior," "deliverer," and "one who makes atonement" (PF 17). His hypothesized "Disciple" is one who is in the grip of sin, and needs to be "converted," a process that requires "repentance" and leads to "new birth" (18–19). The irony is in fact inherent in the very project of "inventing" Christianity, since the defining characteristic of the "Thought-Project," that which distinguishes it from the Socratic view, is the

inability of human beings to conceive the idea on their own. In effect, Climacus has pretended to invent something that cannot be invented; if it exists at all, it is a gift from God.

Does the Irony of *Fragments* Undermine the Content?

That *Fragments* is ironical through and through then can hardly be doubted. More needs to be said, however, about the way the irony works, and the effect of the irony on the content. I claimed above that the irony in *Fragments* is not the common type of irony in which something is said seriously which is in fact foolish or ridiculous, but is instead the rarer kind, in which something serious is said in the form of jest. The evidence for this is implicit in the preceding account of *Fragments*' irony.

An examination of the irony in *Fragments* shows very clearly the inadequacy of Quintilian's classical account of rhetorical irony as involving a mode of speech whereby what is said is the opposite of what is meant. For many of the things Climacus says in *Fragments* are logical truths or basic claims about Christianity that hardly anyone in the implied audience would think of denying. If the Socratic view of the truth is defined as one in which the "moment" when one learns the Truth is inessential, then logically it is indeed the case that any alternative to the Socratic view will have to be one in which the moment is indeed of essential importance. And this would appear to imply that prior to that moment the learner must be devoid of the truth. Climacus can hardly mean to assert the "opposite" of such logical platitudes.

Does Climacus say things that are not meant to be taken seriously? Without a doubt he does, and the textual clues that this is so are abundant. When Climacus claims to have invented his alternative to the Socratic view, we know that he does not wish us to take him seriously, because when the Interlocutor appears and makes the accusation that Climacus is really just presenting Christianity, he cheerfully concedes that this is so. Of course the same point is made by both Climacus and Kierkegaard in their comments on the German review, both of which stress the idea that the "invention" is only "pretended," and that the whole idea is a satire on modern philosophy.

This of course gives us a clue about the target of the satire. Kierkegaard sees Hegelian philosophy as an attempt to defend Christianity against the critiques of the Enlightenment. The defense, however, takes the following form: Hegel in effect says that the content of Christianity is true; it is the religion of Absolute Spirit. That same truth, however, is expressed more adequately in the form of philosophy. Thus, on Hegel's view, Christianity becomes a kind of intellectual doctrine that can be philosophically rational-

ized and clarified. From Kierkegaard's point of view Christianity would be better off with honest enemies than such "friends," and at least one meaning of the motto of *Fragments* ("better well-hanged than badly married") is surely that it would be better to reject Christianity and allow it to die a decent death than to save it by marrying it off to such a philosophical system. The "insolence" of modern philosophy lies in the complacent assumption that it can be the "savior" of Christianity. However, as Climacus (ironically) asks, "isn't that what philosophers are for—to make supernatural things ordinary and trivial?" (PF 53).

Fragments is indeed permeated with irony, but the irony cannot consist in denying or undermining the claim that Christianity is a revealed religion which cannot be reduced to a set of doctrines to be proven or shown to be probable by human reason. Rather, the irony presupposes that the distinction between Christianity and any such doctrines is a proper one. The irony works precisely through the pretence that something that reason could not invent has been invented. For this pretence to work from a literary perspective, it must be true, as it surely is, that Christianity presents itself as a revealed faith that is distinct from any human philosophical doctrine. If the distinction between Christianity and any such doctrine is not valid, the joke loses its point.

We get more light on the victim of the irony by a closer look at the Interlocutor. The Interlocutor is knowledgeable and well read, and clearly in one sense "knows" the claims that *Fragments* is ironically making. Despite this knowledge, the Interlocutor appears to be a bit dim in terms of conceptual understanding. He claims near the end of chapter 4 to have immediately, if only dimly, grasped the "far-reaching implications" of Climacus's hypothesis, though his response at the beginning of chapter 5, where he quibbles as to whether or not it is legitimate to lump all the "later generations" into one category, shows that he has clearly missed the main point. Chapter 4 has already argued that immediate contemporaneity is unimportant; the only thing important is that the learner receive the "Condition" directly from the God. The Interlocutor, to put it plainly, appears to be a knowledgeable fool, who claims in a blustering way to understand the consequences of a view he does not understand at all.

It seems plausible to think that the intended victim of the irony is someone like the Interlocutor, someone in Christendom who is confused about the basic character of Christianity and its relation to human thought. By contrast, what we might call the intended audience, the people who "get" the irony, must be people who welcome a bracing reminder about what they already know, but may be tempted to forget. Perhaps these latter people have

been confused by the various "logical transcriptions" of Christianity offered, not just by philosophers but by theologians as well. The ironical and humorous reminders Climacus offers about the basic character of Christian orthodoxy do not have to be seen as apologetic in character. As the "Moral" implies, an individual may understand the difference between the Socratic and Christian views and prefer the former. But at least such a person understands what genuine Christianity is and can have some clarity about it, whether he or she believes or is offended.

A Contemporary Analogy

In order to show how the irony works in *Fragments*, I wish to risk giving a contemporary analogy. Of course the analogy ultimately fails: as Climacus himself insists when he tells his tale of the king who fell in love with the peasant, no human analogy can really adequately mirror the content of the gospel. I want to give an example, however, of how one might say something serious in the form of a jest, so as to get a better sense of how we do read *Fragments*.

To set the stage for my analogy, I need to make some remarks about the contemporary educational scene in the United States. Everyone recognizes that the universities in the United States exist in part for the transmission of knowledge. Faculty are hired to teach; students come to the universities to learn. The state legislatures who fund public universities do so in part because they are committed to an educated citizenry; the individuals who pay tuition to attend universities, public and private, do so because they wish to become educated and attain the degrees that symbolize and certify that they have this status. If one looks at the mission statements of universities and the public statements of presidents and chancellors, teaching and learning are always said to be central to the missions of schools.

Despite these evident facts, however, it is widely recognized that in many of our research universities teaching has extremely low importance. Faculty are hired, tenured, and promoted almost solely on the grounds of their accomplishments as researchers. Teaching is often relegated to graduate students. What is worse, the students who are taught by graduate students may in most cases be better off, since the graduate students may be more likely actually to care whether their students learn.

Suppose that someone who cares passionately about teaching wants to write an essay that would encourage people in the contemporary university to take the responsibility of teaching more seriously. And let us suppose that the most effective means of doing this is to utilize irony, since we have a sit-

uation in which almost everyone acknowledges in theory a principle that in actuality is ignored. One option would be to employ what Kierkegaard called the most common form of irony—to write something in a serious manner that is in fact foolishness. Someone taking this strategy might, for example, write an essay that proposes, in an apparently serious way, that the contemporary university could be improved by the simple expedient of abolishing the category of "student." After all, if all the students were sent home, then faculty would be free to do their "real" work.

Suppose, however, that the person who wishes to defend the value of teaching wanted to use the "rarer" form of irony, to write something that is in fact serious in the form of a jest. Such a person might construct an essay along the following lines: The essay might announce, in a breathless voice, that the author has made an amazing discovery. There are people walking around the university called "students." Furthermore, at least some of these people seem to have come to the university to learn things. Although the author knows it is a bold and far-out idea, he or she suggests that some of the professors might actually meet with some of these hitherto unnoticed people on campus and try to impart some of their own hard-won knowledge. Of course, the author will admit, it is a lot to expect that busy university professors would take time to do such a thing. Yet who knows what the consequences of such a radical move might be? The students might actually become educated people; the professors, though one can hardly dare to hope for such a utopian outcome, might find satisfaction and meaning in helping to shape the lives of young people.

If we came across such an ironical essay, how should we understand it? We would surely misunderstand the essay if we thought the author to be suggesting that there were not in fact students on university campuses or that it would not in fact be a good idea for professors to meet with students and try to teach them about what they know. The irony consists, after all, in suggesting, as if it were a new and shocking proposal, what everyone at the university already knows to be part of the responsibilities of a professor—an ideal to which everyone already gives lip service, but is in reality something to which the contemporary university sorely needs to be reminded of. The irony in such a case presupposes the validity of what is said. What is ironically undermined is not the value of teaching, but the hypocrisy that claims to value teaching but in fact regards teaching as a waste of time.

In a similar manner, when Climacus reminds us that Christianity is a revealed religion, and that the fact of God becoming incarnate is much more important than any philosophical teaching that might come from the lips of the God who is incarnate, he is hardly telling his readers anything they do

not already know. Any well-brought up Danish child would know that to be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus, understood not merely as a Jewish philosopher, but as the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world. Once one sees that Climacus is not really inventing anything, but reminding readers of what traditional Christian orthodoxy really is, then one can hardly miss the point. Climacus himself lets the cat out of the bag at the end by explicitly telling us that "if he ever writes a sequel" he will "give the problem its proper historical costume" and discuss Christianity, which is "the only historical phenomenon" that has ever invested history with this kind of eternal significance (PF 109). The irony cannot consist of denying or undermining these platitudes about Christianity, but rather in ironically undermining the stance of those who claim to be Christian and thus committed to such claims, but who in reality understand Christianity in a way that makes it to be something essentially different than what it is. "But to go beyond Socrates when one nevertheless says essentially the same as he, only not nearly so well—that at least is not Socratic" (111).

Once we see this, then we must look at the "blunt readings" of Lowrie, Swenson, and Thulstrup in a somewhat different light. It is true that these commentators do not do full justice to the ironical character of *Philosophical Fragments*. Thulstrup, for example, cannot be right in denying that *Fragments* is genuinely pseudonymous. His argument on behalf of this claim is essentially that if we compare the content of *Fragments* with things Kierkegaard published under his own name, we will find "hardly any inconsistency."[23] We can now see that this is a weak argument; of course we will not find Kierkegaard contradicting the truths of which he feels his contemporaries need reminding. However, the humorous and satirical voice we hear in the book is far from Kierkegaard's own. Nor is this contradicted by the fact that Kierkegaard may have originally written the book intending to publish it under his own name, with the pseudonym being a later thought. For it is quite possible that he discovered or decided on reflection that the voice heard in the book was not his own voice, but one that required a pseudonym.

There is of course an irony that is inherent in the situation created by the reception of *Fragments* as a book of "dogmatic theology." As we have seen, there is a sense in which the mistake of reading the book in this manner is not wholly a mistake; the book does in fact embody what we might call some of the basic elements of Christian theology. However, that a book that Kierkegaard wrote as an ironical reminder to his readers of things they already knew now reads to many as if it were an original contribution to theology is itself deeply ironical. Such a situation is an ironical comment on

how deeply confused many are about the nature of what Kierkegaard himself called "Christian orthodoxy."

Stable and Unstable Irony

John Lippitt has recently called attention to the importance of Wayne Booth's distinction between "stable" and "unstable" irony.[24] In the contemporary world the concept of irony has become very expansive. We speak of events as ironical, of "dramatic irony," and indeed some authors virtually make irony to be coextensive with literature.[25] Booth's discussion of stable and unstable irony restricts itself to examples of intentional irony, especially so-called verbal irony. Since my focus has been on a literary text, *Philosophical Fragments*, much of what Booth has to say about intentional irony has been relevant to my task, and the same is true for the distinction he draws between stable and unstable irony.

For Booth, both these types of irony involve a "mask," in which the author poses a riddle by putting forward an affirmation that clearly must be rejected, or at least cannot be taken at face value. However, with unstable irony, no reconstruction of the author's position is possible because the "universe of discourse" of the author is one that is "inherently absurd," and this implies that "all statements are subject to ironic undermining."[26] Stable irony, by contrast, is irony in which the author has or takes a position, and where the irony may function in such a way that the reader who "gets it" at least is offered the possibility of making that position his or her own. Stable irony is, then, irony endowed with a moral purposiveness. Lippitt argues, I believe correctly, that Booth's distinction roughly parallels the distinction drawn by Kierkegaard himself in *The Concept of Irony* between irony as "infinite absolute negativity" and that "controlled irony" which constitutes the "truth of irony" (261, 324–29). We must ask ourselves about the relation of Kierkegaard to the Romantic ironists whom he sees as leading us to the abyss. Is irony the disciplinarian that frees us from immediacy and helps us see the spiritual significance of human life? Or is irony itself the final truth, the truth that all truths must ultimately dissolve in the fire?

I have in this paper argued that Kierkegaard himself used irony for his own spiritual purposes; the irony in *Fragments* is controlled, stable irony. One point in favor of my contention is that, paradoxically, seeing Kierkegaardian irony in this way makes the text more interesting. Conant's ironical reading flattens Kierkegaard's text, leading to a situation similar to one that Hegel famously described as a night in which all cows are black. If everything in the Climacus readings is "nonsense," and the point that I am

supposed to gain from the books is that they are saying what cannot be said, then the specifics of the discussions of contemporaneity, history, suffering, guilt, subjectivity, and truth all become less interesting. If it is all nonsense, then why waste time making sense of the distinctions and arguments? This is even more true if we follow Poole and take Kierkegaard as merely self-consciously illustrating what is true of all texts. As Booth says, if all of literature is irony, then our appreciation of those specific literary forms we call "irony" becomes questionable.[27]

Of course my claim that seeing Kierkegaardian irony as stable, controlled irony that makes the texts more interesting can be challenged. A Kierkegaard who gives us "an endless play of signifiers" is in many ways an aesthetically enchanting Kierkegaard. He is at the very least a Kierkegaard who cannot make us uncomfortable by challenging us with a definite moral and religious position. Perhaps part of the appeal of a Kierkegaard who presents us with "infinite, absolute, negativity" (CI 312) is precisely that such a Kierkegaard allows us to play with the texts as we see fit. Perhaps we think we can even have our cake and eat it too if we follow the lead of Conant and combine a reading of the Climacus texts as nonsense with an edifying exhortation that moral and religious truths can only be lived and not thought. Of course it is true that for Kierkegaard, as for Climacus, God's incarnation in Christ is something human reason cannot understand, and God's gift of himself is not directed to our intellects as an intellectual puzzle to be contemplated and solved. Christ is not the object of knowledge but the object of faith. However, faith must have content, a content that we can in a way understand (so that we can understand why we cannot truly understand it) so that we may build our lives around it. That content can and must be thought, as a task for life.

The Kierkegaard who gives us "mastered" or "controlled" irony in *Fragments* is a Kierkegaard who is a master of conceptual clarification as well as a master of irony and humor. He understands that the God who has revealed himself in history is a God who can be grasped in faith. The irony does not undermine but presupposes the claims of Christian revelation.

Chapter 5

Kierkegaard's View of Humor: Must Christians Always Be Solemn?

Many people view humor and a serious religious life as antithetical. This essay attempts to elucidate Kierkegaard's view of humor and thereby to explain his claims that humor is essentially linked to a religious life, and that the capacity for humor resides in a deep structure of human existence. In his writings Kierkegaard offers us a theory of what humor is, and two interesting theses about humor. To begin with the theses, he argues first of all that there is an essential connection between humor and human existence. The idea is that humor is no ephemeral or accidental human characteristic but is grounded in something deep within our nature or our condition. This idea that humor touches something deep is one Kierkegaard shares with many other theorists about humor.

The second thesis is more unusual, however, and consequently more controversial. Kierkegaard also wants to claim that there is an essential connection between humor and the religious life. Quite contrary to the stereotype of the religious life as dour and somber, completely opposed to the carefree wit of the humorist, Kierkegaard holds that the highest and deepest kind of humor is rooted in a life view which is recognizably religious, and that all humor is fundamentally made possible by those very features of human life which make the religious life possible.

Before examining these two theses in detail and seeing what can be said on their behalf, we must first look at Kierkegaard's overall account of what humor is. Before doing that, it will be helpful to take a look at theories of humor generally.

Philosophical Theories of Humor

What is a philosophical theory of humor? Primarily it is an account of what humor is in its essence. The aim is not so much to know what makes us laugh, but why something makes us laugh. And though I just spoke of laughter, and certainly there is a close connection between humor and laughter, a theory of humor is not identical with a theory of laughter. We find many things humorous which do not actually cause us to laugh; conversely, we laugh in many situations where we see nothing humorous, at least at the time, the laugh of nervous embarrassment being a good example.

By and large theories of humor fall into one of three types.[1] These are relief theories, superiority theories, and incongruity theories. These three types are not always mutually exclusive but are capable of being combined with each other in various ways.

Relief theories, which would include Freud and Spencer as notable examples, generally focus on humor as a pleasurable experience, which consists in or is causally related to a discharge of accumulated tension or energy. Freud, for example, appeals to the fact that so much humor revolves around sex and aggression (often disguised), and theorizes that humor, especially in jokes, provides a way of discharging sexual and aggressive instincts which society forces us to repress.

Superiority theories are actually the oldest of the three and number among their famous proponents Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes. The basic idea is that humor is a pleasant experience of oneself as superior. When we laugh, according to Hobbes, we express "a sudden glory arising from some conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly."[2]

Though Hobbes does say that the superiority we enjoy in humor is not always over others, it still seems that this is the paradigm case. Some have even theorized that laughter evolved from "the roar of triumph in an ancient jungle duel,"[3] or from "the baring of one's teeth as a demonstration of physical prowess."[4]

The third major type of theory, made famous by Kant and Schopenhauer, is the incongruity theory. This view, which is, as we shall see, very much like Kierkegaard's, is that humor arises through some contrast between what we would normally expect and the actual course of our experience. The incongruity must be one that is experienced as pleasant, of course. Still, humor is regarded as rooted in something that goes against the normal patterns grounded in our past experience.

Kierkegaard's Theory

Now what is Kierkegaard's theory? How is it different from and related to these traditional types of theories? As I have already said, fundamentally Kierkegaard's theory is an incongruity theory, with strong similarities to Kant and Schopenhauer. Kierkegaard, however, is also able to incorporate significant elements from the relief and superiority theories. Gaining an understanding of Kierkegaard's view of humor is made more difficult by the fact that he does not really discuss humor for its own sake, but rather to illuminate his theory of the stages or spheres of existence. I shall take a look at the place of humor in the "stages on life's way" presently, but I shall first try to extract Kierkegaard's general theory of humor.

Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus defines humor in terms of the concept of the comical. A humorist is a person who has mastered the comical, because humor "has the comic *within itself*" (CUP 1:521; italics in original). The comical in turn is defined in terms of "contradiction." "The tragic and the comic are the same, insofar as both are contradiction; but *the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical the painless contradiction*" (1:514; italics in original). Climacus follows this definition with a long footnote listing examples of jokes and other humorous situations.

These jokes and situations make it very clear that by "contradiction" Climacus really means "incongruity," certainly not logical or formal contradiction. A caricature is said to be comical because of the contradiction between likeness and unlikeness which it contains. In a similar way a person who answers a rhetorical question is said to be comical, the contradiction being that he answers a question for which no answer was expected. My favorite example of humor from this footnote is the story of the German-Danish clergyman who believes he has said "The Word became flesh" because he has been fooled by the false cognates, the German *Fleisch* and the Danish *Flæsk*. What he actually has said from the pulpit is "The Word became pork."

In all these examples there is a "contradiction," but what is contradicted is our normal expectation as to what goes with what, and what follows what. The patterns of our experience are disrupted and the result is experienced as incongruous. (Parenthetically, this use of the term "contradiction" as meaning "incongruity" should give pause to those who insist on thinking that when Climacus and Kierkegaard call the incarnation a contradiction they must mean logical or formal contradiction.)

Climacus realizes that not every incongruity is comical, however. A contradiction is comical, rather than tragic, only if it is experienced as pleasant.

This is not merely determined by the content of the contradiction, but also by the relationship of the individual to the incongruity. The same event can be tragic to one person and comic to another, and even tragic and comic successively to the same person.

Climacus expresses this by saying that humor demands that one occupy a "higher" or "superior" perspective. The individual who is "trapped" or "caught" by a contradiction experiences it as tragic. To be amusing, the contradiction must be one for which the individual knows a "way out." He must be able to distance himself by viewing the whole business from a superior vantage point.

It is clear then that Kierkegaard's view of humor, as developed by his pseudonym Climacus (and here I see no significant differences between Kierkegaard and Climacus), is a version of the incongruity theory. However, there are significant elements of the other two theories as well in Kierkegaard's thought. The notion of superiority is significant in relation to humor because it is the possession of a superior position that enables an individual to experience an incongruity as pleasant rather than painful. Also implicit in his view is the notion that humor provides a relief from the vexations of life. Though Kierkegaard would certainly reject the mechanical "discharge of psychic energy" model, which is present in Freud, because he would not think that such mechanical concepts could aptly describe a person's mental and spiritual life, he certainly recognizes the common-sense experience of relief which gives Freud's view its plausibility. The person who sees something humorously has found a "way out." Temporarily, at least, he has escaped the pain of life.

Humor and Human Existence

With Kierkegaard's basic understanding of humor in mind, we can now look at the theses which I attributed to Kierkegaard at the beginning of this paper: that humor is essentially linked to both existence and religiousness. First we shall look at humor in the context of existence.

Many thinkers are inclined to agree with Kierkegaard that humor is closely linked to something fundamental in human life. A person who had absolutely no capacity to perceive anything as humorous would not be like someone with no capacity for doing algebra or playing the violin. Those capacities seem accidental, and however unfortunate an individual who totally lacked them might be, she could still be fully human. Someone with absolutely no capacity for humor would strike us as fundamentally different from us, so different as possibly to make us wonder whether the person

might be an angel, a robot, or an extraterrestrial, rather than a human being. I believe, therefore, that Kierkegaard's first thesis—that humor is essentially connected to human existence—is more in need of illumination than defense. What we want to know is why this connection holds, and Kierkegaard does of course have something to say which is helpful here.

The reason humor is basic to human life is simply that contradiction is basic to human life. Several of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, including Climacus, Vigilius Haufniensis, and Anti-Climacus, speak of human existence as a "synthesis" of contrasting or opposing elements. The self is seen as an attempt to unify temporality and eternity, body and soul, necessity and possibility, finitude and infinitude. In existence, however, the synthesis always remains incomplete, unfinished, and hence an incongruity between the opposing elements always remains.

All of us have ideals, plans, possibilities: goals towards which we strive. We are partly defined by the futures we seek. All of us are, however, equally defined by our pasts, particularly those necessities which we did not choose but are fundamentally a part of us for better or worse. We did not choose our parents, our sex, our early upbringing. All of us are fundamentally engaged in a movement from what we have been to what we would be. But for none of us is this movement totally serene. No one is a stranger to the tension between reality and ideal. Yet our identity is found in both reality and ideal, or to be more precise, in the movement from one to the other.

If both the comic and the tragic are grounded in contradiction, and if human existence itself at its very heart is a contradiction, then it is clear why the capacity to sense the tragic and comical is basic to human life:

> Existence itself . . . is a striving, and is just as pathetic as comical; pathetic, because the striving is infinite, or directed toward the infinite, is infinitizing, which is the highest pathos; comical, because the striving is a self-contradiction. (CUP 1:92)

Two qualifications must be made at this point. First, saying that the capacity for humor is explained by the contradictory structure of human life does not imply that all humor must be rooted directly in the deepest structures of existence. It is true that our deepest humor symbolizes and often directly expresses the gap between the ideal and the actual which is basic to human life. But we also laugh at all kinds of incongruities, trivial ones as well as meaningful ones, silly puns and witty plays on words as well as themes which directly bear on our identity as selves. One might say that the fact that human existence is fundamentally contradictory guarantees that humans will have a sensitivity to the contradictory, whenever it appears. This does not, however, imply that all humor must somehow be deep and profound.

The second qualification is that it is only the *capacity* for humor which the contradictory character of human existence gives to the individual. The degree to which that capacity is realized depends upon several factors. One must recall that to experience a contradiction as comical, one must experience it in a painless manner, which requires a superior, somewhat removed perspective. One's ability to gain such a perspective is partly a matter of how reflective one is. Hence, Climacus says that education or culture is a prerequisite for at least some types of humor (CUP 1:502–3, see also 1:176–77). The second factor which affects one's ability to take such a detached perspective is one's religious orientation. To explain this we must move to Kierkegaard's second thesis.

Humor and Religiousness

One of the oldest stereotypes of the religious individual is that he is humorless, a person whose serious mindset precludes levity. This stereotype is not limited to popular films and books, but is held by philosophers as well, Nietzsche being a good illustration. Recently, in a fine book about humor, John Morreall has repeated the charge that religion, especially in the Judeo-Christian form, is incompatible with humor. According to Morreall, from a Christian perspective "everything we think, say, and do brings us closer to eternal happiness or to eternal damnation."[5] If Christians were to take this seriously and really try to live in this light, "they would undoubtedly be more solemn in everything they do. Activities for mere amusement would be suppressed or eliminated, and it is hard to see how laughter might survive."[6]

Kierkegaard agrees with Morreall that the Christian life is a life of earnestness, but he rejects the claim that this earnestness precludes humor. He claims, rather, that humor is closely connected to a type of religious life, which is in turn closely connected with Christianity though not identical with it. Thus humor is closely linked with Christianity. In the *Journals and Papers* he tells us that "the humorous is present throughout Christianity" (2:1682). In another journal entry he says that Christianity is the most humorous view of life in world history (2:1681).

To understand Kierkegaard's claims here one must try to understand the place of humor in his theory of the stages or spheres of existence. It is of course a well-known thesis of Kierkegaard's that there are three stages or spheres of existence. The aesthetic life is the natural or immediate kind of life in which everyone begins, where one simply attempts to satisfy one's natural desires or urges. The aesthete lives for the moment. The ethical life is the life

in which one grasps the significance of the eternal and by ethical resolve attempts to transcend one's natural desires and create a unified life. The religious life is the life in which one recognizes the impossibility of actualizing the eternal through positive action and instead attempts to grasp it through repentance and suffering.

This simple or not-so-simple schema of the three stages of existence is complicated by the inclusion of irony and humor as boundary zones or spheres. Irony constitutes the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical while humor constitutes the boundary between the ethical and the religious.

It is very difficult to understand just what it means to regard humor as such a "boundary zone." I think the key to making sense of this is to make a distinction between humor as a general element in life and humor as a zone or sphere of existence in Kierkegaard's special sense. The former is an ordinary sense of humor; the latter involves a technical sense. The humorist in the latter sense, who occupies the boundary zone in Kierkegaard's schema, is someone who has taken the humor which is a general element in life and made it the fundamental ground of his distinctive way of life. Thus "humor" in the ordinary sense is related to, but not identical with, humor as a boundary zone of existence. Since the two are related, what Kierkegaard says about humor as a boundary does shed some light on humor generally.

Everyone who exists has, as we have already seen, a sensitivity for the comic just by virtue of existing. Everyone is able to see a contradiction here or there and to smile and laugh at it. Not everyone, however, is able to see and face the fundamental contradiction in her own existence—to smile and laugh over herself. Many people can laugh only in the Hobbesian way, at the infirmities of others. The humorist in Kierkegaard's special sense has learned to smile at the whole of life, because she has learned to smile at herself. She can see the incongruity between her ideals and her actions, the contrast between the eternal love she was created for and the feeble temporal actions through which she attempts to create and express that love.

It should now be plain why humor in this deep, profound sense is so close to the religious life. The heart of the religious life is this very perception of the permanent discrepancy between ideal and actuality. It is this which leads the religious individual in Kierkegaard's sense to see suffering and repentance as the highest human actions, as opposed to the victorious action of the ethicist. (See especially the section on "Existential Pathos" in *Postscript* [CUP 387–525] in this connection.) Yet Kierkegaard does not simply identify humor with the religious life. In the *Postscript* Climacus calls humor the *confinium* or boundary of the religious life, at least of that natural religiousness called "religiousness A." Why is this?

The answer lies in recalling that to perceive a contradiction as humorous one must perceive it from a detached standpoint. The religious individual in *Postscript*, who is strenuously seeking to existentially realize the resignation, suffering, and guilt which characterize the religious life, has no such perspective. In fact, he comes close in some ways to Morreall's stereotype of the religious individual as humorless. (Though ultimately Climacus claims he escapes this charge. The religious individual does go to the Deer Park for his outing, and he enjoys himself, but only after fearful anguish and reflection.)

In *Postscript* humor becomes the "out" to which a person escapes when he can no longer endure the fearful stress of the truly religious life. For the humorist does have that "higher perspective." The humorist intellectually sees what the religious individual sees. He has a knowledge of the great contradiction which is the heart of the religious life. But the humorist is someone who rests in "recollection." He believes, like Socrates and Plato, that the eternal is something that all humans possess already. The humorist can smile at the contradictions in life because he sees life itself as fundamentally a jest; the eternal bliss one is seeking is in one's possession already. "To exist is like walking down a road," but the remarkable thing about it from the humorist's perspective is that "the goal lies behind" (CUP 1:449).

One can see from this that humor itself embodies a religious perspective of sorts, one different from yet very close to that which Climacus characterizes as religiousness A. Both humor and religiousness A are characterized as belonging to "immanence" and as resting in "recollection." The difference is that in religiousness A the individual attempts to existentially realize the eternal consciousness which he "recollects"; the humorist sees such earnest striving as a jest and not worth the trouble. For the humorist, however much one strives, we "all get equally far" (CUP 1:450). All of us possess eternity already; nothing one does is of any eternal significance.

So humor and religiousness are not identical. Yet something like humor remains as an element in religiousness A. There is present in religiousness A "an obscurely sensed possibility" that the existential problem of guilt which the individual cannot himself overcome *is* in some way overcome. The eternal is in some way a possession (CUP 1:541). Such a sense that the eternal is secure and guilt has been resolved is necessary to "prevent the individual from leaping aside to despair" (1:554). This seems very close to the humorist's "way out." Humor and religiousness A appear then as the two poles in what Climacus would term mankind's natural religiosity: the pole of serene and contemplative reflection and the pole of feverish, anguished action. Most actual religious lives will contain both elements and will, to a degree, oscillate between them.

Humor and Christianity

We see then that Kierkegaard has a concept of "humor" as a sphere of existence which embodies a clearly religious view of life, a view which stands in an intimate relationship to what Climacus terms religiousness A. Religiousness A is not, however, identical with Christianity, though it seems to be a transfigured element in Christian faith. Why is it then that Kierkegaard specifically links humor and Christianity?

Here the textual evidence is obscure indeed. The best clue is, I think, the often repeated claim that humor embodies a *knowledge* of Christianity which has not been existentially realized in life (CUP 1:272). What lies behind this is surely the idea that the humorist has gained a knowledge of the incarnation, that great contradiction which Climacus terms "Absolute Paradox," and is somehow able to smile about this. At least an apparent higher perspective must have been discovered. This apparent higher perspective, which in the case of the pure humorist is illusory, can only be found in the Christian doctrines of grace and forgiveness.

If there is a place for humor in Christianity, it must surely rest on these two doctrines. Despite the fact that life is earnest for the Christian, there is also a place for the humorous smile and even for laughter. (Perhaps it is partly *because* of the fact that life is earnest; I think that the incongruities which strike us as most deeply humorous usually relate to what we care deeply about.) That place for humor is provided by the grace of God and the forgiveness which is offered freely in Christ. It is this which makes it possible for the earnest individual to smile at the contradiction between his life and the ideal he sees in Christ.

It is this doctrine, I believe, of which Kierkegaard's humorist has acquired a knowledge. In viewing this doctrine solely as a doctrine, however, the humorist inevitably misunderstands it. For the Christian the grace of God and forgiveness in Christ are found through faith, which is an existential passion with a concrete historical object. His life then becomes a blend of jest and earnestness, a gift and a task. The gift is given with the task, and the task with the gift.

The humorist, however, misperceives this as a philosophical doctrine, an eternal truth about the human condition. Forgiveness is not something to be grasped in time, but an eternal possession. We are all forgiven eternally. Our forgiveness must simply be "recollected," and we all do get equally far. The task is depreciated, and one is left with a sympathetic, jesting attitude toward life.

The Humorist Today

This all-too-brief account of Kierkegaard's theory of humor bristles with problems and questions.[7] Nothing has been said, for example, of what Kierkegaard called demonic humor, which corresponds closely to what would today be termed nihilistic humor. Kierkegaard views this type of humor as an attack on the eternal meaning which gives existence its depth. Here the "way out" for the laugher is not a positive leap *to* the eternal, but a negative leap *from* the eternal—to nothingness. Surely a great deal of humor in the twentieth century would fit this category. But such topics must be left for another day.

It is worth asking in conclusion, however, whether Kierkegaard's analysis of humor fits our contemporary experience of humor. Are there contemporaries who fit Kierkegaard's description of the humorist? I believe there are. Woody Allen and Garrison Keillor are the names which come to mind.

In his movies Allen has pictured better than anyone else I know the basic incongruity of human life. Yet somehow the incongruities in Allen's films are tempered. We find ourselves able to smile at life and at ourselves. We sense a sympathetic, healing conviction that at bottom our lives mean something, a conviction which sometimes wrestles with darker, more nihilistic overtones, but is hardly ever totally extinguished.

A joke at the end of *Annie Hall* (one that I have been told comes from Groucho Marx) expresses this perfectly. A man is talking to his therapist and says that his brother is crazy. "He thinks he's a chicken!" "Why don't you turn him in?" replies the therapist. "I would, but I need the eggs." The character Allen plays in the movie then glosses the joke to make an analogy to human life in general: "I guess that's pretty much how I feel about relationships. I feel they're totally irrational, crazy, and absurd, but I guess we keep going through it because most of us need the eggs."

Certainly this sort of humor embodies no explicit religious perspective in any conventional sense. But it seems to me to subtly express, precisely through its sympathetic humor, a sense that we are all redeemed. We all get equally far; in a sense we get nowhere. But we nevertheless have an "obscurely sensed possibility," as Climacus would put it, that it all comes right in the end.

Woody Allen, then, seems to be a humorist in Kierkegaard's special sense. Such a humorist is, as Kierkegaard would say, far from being a Christian. Perhaps he is even far from that natural religiousness Climacus terms religiousness A. But such a humorist clearly perceives the existential incongruity which lies at the heart of the religious struggle. And perhaps, as

Climacus would say, his sympathetic humor expresses a knowledge of the grace and forgiveness which figure so strongly in both Judaism and Christianity.

Garrison Keillor is, if anything, an even better illustration of the Kierkegaardian view of humor. Keillor nicely vindicates another of Kierkegaard's theses about humor: humor is not only embedded in a type of religiousness A which includes a *knowledge* of Christianity; it can also be a part of a life which is authentically Christian. Humor is the "incognito" of the genuinely religious person. Garrison Keillor's monologues from Lake Wobegon" exhibit the most profound theological themes of Christian faith. Those themes, however, are exhibited not as doctrines, but as realized in the lives of the people of Lake Wobegon: guilt, forgiveness, mercy, love—all are there. And much to our surprise, when they are thus exhibited, the result is humorous. It is not the humor of a Hobbes which revels in one's own superiority, but the deep humor which binds one more closely to one's fellow human beings.

In a convocation talk at Luther Northwestern Seminary in 1983, Keillor says explicitly that "a person who follows Christ will never lack for comedy." It is not difficult to grasp his meaning here; someone who takes seriously Christ's teachings about loving one's enemies or giving to the poor cannot help but see her life as incongruous, if she has even a modest degree of honesty. But insofar as she is following Christ the redeemer, the incongruity can be experienced as humorous, for Christ is indeed the way out. As Keillor himself says, "laughter is a kind of forgiveness."

Perhaps it is appropriate to end with another joke from *Annie Hall*. Two ladies are complaining at a resort in the Catskills. "The food is really terrible here," remarks one. The other replies, "Yeah, and such small portions." Someone who has not cared for the content of this chapter at least cannot complain about the smallness of the portion!

Chapter 6

Misusing Religious Language: Something about Kierkegaard and *The Myth of God Incarnate*

Unbelievers, Believers, and Adaptors

At the risk of a tremendous oversimplification, I believe it is helpful to categorize views of Christianity that have appeared in the West in the last two hundred years into three major groups. First there are the "unbelievers," those for whom Christianity is straightforwardly untrue, unknowable, or unbelievable (or all three). This group would include those who try to salvage some form of essentially humanistic religion as well as those who simply turn away from religious belief altogether, either to put their ultimate hopes in political ideology, or science, or simply to attempt to limit themselves to hopes which are finite and nonultimate in character.

The second group I would designate the "believers." I have in mind here those who have retained their belief in the central Christian doctrines as represented by the classical creeds. As in the first group, there is a tremendous diversity here. I believe it is possible to include in such a group Catholics, Episcopalians, Calvinists, Methodists, Baptists, and Pentecostals without so stretching the boundaries that the group becomes too ill defined to make reference to it meaningful. I would include in such a group both those who simply repeat past formulas in a literal and perhaps sometimes unthinking way, as well as those seeking to reinterpret those formulas in such a way as to maintain and restore their credibility.

The third group I would characterize as "adaptors." By this term I mean to designate those who cannot or do not wish to desert Christianity for some

form of religious humanism or simply to become irreligious, but who cannot or do not wish to believe the substance of classical orthodox Christianity. Of course, the line between the second group and this one may be difficult to draw. In an individual case it may be difficult (even impossible) to decide whether a theologian is reinterpreting a classical doctrine or altering it beyond recognition. The task of making this distinction is continually complicated by the fact that adaptors generally try to preserve as much traditional language and imagery as possible, no doubt for sound psychological reasons. The problem which the adaptor is up against generally is how to preserve the pathos and inwardness of the faith of our fathers while altering its content. It is naturally a great help if the old language and imagery are preserved.

The adaptor, then, usually strenuously resists any claim that he has no right to use this traditional language. He will point out that this language has a history; that it arose at a certain time and has evolved. Why cannot this process continue? Do his opponents have a copyright to these emotionally significant words?

The adaptor has a point. Language (except for trademarks and copyrights) is no one's property. Surely people must be allowed to use language in the way that best suits them and their purposes. But the opponents of the adaptor, both humanist and believers, have a point, too. In fact, they have more than a point; they have a legitimate grievance. Because language is no one's personal property but is the common medium through which human beings communicate with one another, a person should use language responsibly, in a way that does not hinder or impede our ability to communicate. And there is grave danger of this happening in the case of the adaptor.

An Example of Misuse of Language

Let me try to explain by using an illustration from the philosophy of mind. Suppose I were a convinced materialist who wished to deny that human beings possess a nonmaterial mind, soul, spirit, or anything else nonmaterial. I designate my position as "materialism" and wish by that term to exclude any and every form of dualism. Suppose I met a person who also called himself a materialist. However, to my consternation I found, when I questioned this person, that he believed a person's mental life is essentially independent of his brain, that it is possible for an individual's conscious life to survive the death and disintegration of his body. When I asked this person how his view could reasonably be called materialism, suppose he answered as follows:

> I believe that the soul which survives bodily death is material, only a very special kind of matter. Certainly my usage of the term "matter" differs from the traditional use, but after all, this concept has a history. It emerged at a certain time, has evolved, and will no doubt continue to evolve. I am merely continuing this process. It is very important for me psychologically to call my view "materialism" because materialism is the only believable worldview in a scientific age. Who are you to deny me my right to use language as I see fit?

In this situation, I would certainly have a legitimate grievance against my "materialist" acquaintance. For if his usage is allowed to stand, the distinction between my views and those views I mean to oppose will be blurred, or rather demolished. One of the most important functions of language is precisely to make possible such distinctions. My "materialist" friend is more dangerous to me than any opponent. An opponent who attacks my view can be repelled, perhaps. But a "friend" who makes my view meaningless makes it impossible to attack or defend my view. (Which is why a dualist will be just as much disturbed by this misuse of language as I myself.)

Hence, if my "materialist" friend persists in using the term "materialism" in his peculiar way, I shall be compelled to invent some other word to designate my position, or to distinguish between materialism 1 and materialism 2. But in doing so I might justifiably feel aggrieved. In calling myself a materialist I meant to identify myself with an old and (to me) honorable tradition. In compelling me to use another term, the pseudomaterialist has usurped my place in that tradition.

No doubt the analogy to religion would seem better if I reversed the roles in my fictitious story. For the religious adaptor is clearly more like someone who calls himself a dualist but uses the dualistic language of soul and spirit in a materialistic way—than like a person who calls himself a materialist, but is actually a dualist in disguise. But I intentionally avoided the closer analogy for the following reason: People who find the religious adaptor's position congenial are apt to find a similar position in the philosophy of mind congenial! Sympathy for the misuse of language in question might have once more obscured the injustice done, both to genuine dualists and genuine materialists.

A Criterion for Detecting Misuse of Language

Now why am I justified in calling these linguistic shifts misuses of language, both in the fields of philosophy of mind and in religion? Let us take the philosophy of mind illustration first. No one should object to either a dualist or

a materialist attempting to revitalize or develop his position by creative thought. Though it may be difficult to distinguish this process from alteration of a position to such an extent that it is abandoned, perhaps the line can be drawn in at least one case. Surely it is wrong to take a set of terms with a continuous history and a reasonably coherent meaning, still used by an active tradition in their historical sense, and use them to designate a position which these terms were originally developed to exclude and oppose and which they are still used to exclude and oppose. This is the flaw in our "materialist." He is using the language of materialism to designate a position which materialism was expressly designed to exclude. In no sense, then, can he legitimately be said to be "developing" or "extending" the materialist tradition. Though there probably are other, less extreme cases which also would constitute misuse of language, at least this case certainly does appear to be that. And it seems that this gives us at least one reasonable test for the legitimacy of the reinterpretation of language. If we find a theologian using a set of terms to designate a position which those terms were originally designed to negate and exclude, and if the religious tradition in question and its current representatives have generally understood the terms as negating that view, then however much change, development, and vagueness there is or has been in the religious terminology, the contemporary theologian can still be charged with misusing the language in question.

It might seem that these criteria are overly strict. Are there not instances where the meaning of a concept has shifted to its opposite in a legitimate fashion? Take, for example, the concept of the atom. Originally this concept seems to have referred to "the smallest part," the ultimate and indivisible unit of matter. Yet today no one haggles over talk of the parts of an atom. What has happened in this case is that a theoretical concept has been employed to designate an actual entity. As the explanation of that entity continued, it was found to have some characteristics incompatible with its original sense.

Several things make this situation different from our example of the "materialist" in the philosophy of mind. First, the atom retains a good deal of its historical sense. Atoms are still regarded as basic or fundamental elements, even if not absolutely basic. Take, for example, their function in the arrangement of the elements in the atomic chart. Secondly, the group employing the concept in this somewhat new way still holds to that fundamental understanding of the nature of matter which was expressed by those who originally claimed that there were atoms. That is, atoms were originally postulated by those who believed that matter was not continuous but discrete, i.e. composed of particles. The original opponents of the atomic theory were those who held that the concept of a "smallest piece" was meaningless and that

matter must be continuous. Contemporary physicists, while they may not claim that the particular entities we call atoms are the ultimate bits of the universe, have by no means abandoned the view that the universe does have ultimate bits. They are therefore the true descendants of the original atomists. How different the situation would be if there were a sizeable contemporary group of scientists who claimed that matter was continuous and called their view "atomism."

There are of course other examples where the meaning of a term has flip-flopped or reversed to its opposite. In cases where the older meaning is forgotten or has only historical interest, this presents no difficulties and causes no great harm. Let me repeat my criteria for misuse of language. A person or group is misusing language if: (1) The term or terms concerned had at one point a reasonably definite sense, purposefully excluding certain points of view. (2) The meaning of the term or terms in question has been preserved through a continuous historical tradition, which continues to exist and to use the terminologies in their historical sense. (3) The person or group using the terminology uses it to designate the view which the terms were originally designed to exclude or negate.

Even if my criteria are inadequate it seems plain to me that language can be misused in the way I have claimed. The problem of giving an account of this misuse still remains. I suspect, however, that this is a problem which some contemporary religious thinkers will not be eager to solve, for reasons that will shortly become clear.

Theological Illustrations

At this point, I wish to give some concrete examples of what I am talking about. It is tempting to use actual examples from contemporary Christian theological literature. I do not wish, however, to do so at this point, because it is always possible that I have misunderstood some particular theologian, and I would not want my main point to be obscured by an unjust attack on a particular individual. My purpose is amicable; it is to help individuals decide for themselves whether their own honest beliefs are clearly understood and how they should best be expressed.

Also, I want to make it clear that the main point I am making is valid regardless of the worth of my own theological stance. The point is a purely philosophical one, and it is possible to agree with me whether one be atheist, liberal Christian, fundamentalist, or even if one is an adherent of a non-Christian religion. (Someone more learned than myself in such areas might well choose his examples from Islam or Buddhism.)

In any case, I shall first give hypothetical examples. I assure the reader, however, that these examples are realistic. They coincide with views expressed in respectable Christian periodicals and books, differing from the actual examples only perhaps in that I state matters more simply and bluntly and avoid emotionally alluring language which seems to contain more content than it actually does.

Let us take first the doctrine of Christ's resurrection. It seems to me that the early Christians and the great majority of Christians throughout the history of the church who have affirmed their belief in Christ's resurrection have always understood this doctrine as entailing, among many other things of course, that the man Jesus Christ actually died and then came back to life. Belief in the resurrection can be taken as excluding or denying that Jesus remained dead past the time of his resurrection or that he is now dead.

Suppose we encounter a theologian who tells us that the true meaning of the resurrection is that the spirit of love which the disciples had experienced through Jesus was reborn in the disciples after Christ's death. Suppose the theologian goes on to explain that the overwrought disciples experienced this transformation so powerfully that it was almost as if Jesus were still with them. Out of the mix of fear and grief and joy the belief emerged that Jesus was really alive; perhaps aided by a hallucination or other mystical experience. Thus arose a belief in Jesus' actual, bodily resurrection, which strengthened itself through the experience of forgiveness the early Christians found by faith in Jesus.

Whatever the merits of this account, or any other of dozens of similar accounts of the development of the belief in Jesus' resurrection, one thing seems clear. The person putting forward this theory has no right to call this a development or *reinterpretation* of the resurrection or to say that he personally believes in the resurrection. For his account presupposes that Jesus remained dead; otherwise why the ingenious attempts to explain the fact that the early Christians believed him to be alive? (If he really is alive, that itself would best explain their belief.) Since the doctrine of the resurrection was developed and understood precisely to *exclude* the belief that Jesus was still dead, the adapting theologian has no right to the concept at all. If he is honest and has enough courage to break with what may have been his childhood faith, he will then clearly admit that he rejects the doctrine of Christ's resurrection.

A second and closely related example would be the belief in the general bodily resurrection of believers. Please notice that I am in no way defending this doctrine or arguing its coherence or plausibility. Whether the belief in the resurrection of the dead be logically conceivable, empirically plausible, or

whatever, this much is certain: those who originally affirmed that they believed in the bodily resurrection of the dead, and later Christians who maintained this belief, intended to affirm that actual dead individuals will come to life again and resume a bodily existence; therefore they meant to deny the thesis that actual dead individuals do not come to life again.

Suppose then, that a theologian tells us that he believes in the resurrection of the dead, but that he does not mean that the actual human beings who have died will really come to life again and resume a bodily existence. The theologian tells us that the person in question has "eternal life" in the sense that his life and achievements become part of God's everlasting consciousness. The person in question continues to exist not only in God's memory but in God's own ongoing work in the world; he is "resurrected" in other people's lives and in God's own life. Whatever may be the truth or profundity of such a position, it is patently unfair of the individual in question to tell us that he believes in the resurrection of the dead. Even as a purported reinterpretation of the Platonic concept of personal immortality this position seems to me unwarranted, but as a purported statement of what belief in the bodily resurrection of believers amounts to, it is an absurdity.

Kierkegaard's Criticisms of Nineteenth-century Theology

The type of criticism I am making here is by no means new. It is essentially the charge Kierkegaard leveled at the Hegelians in the mid-nineteenth century. Kierkegaard's philosophical pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, develops the following line of argument in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.[1] He assumes, first of all, that there was (and is) something distinctive about Christianity, when compared with philosophical and religious thought in paganism. The Christian faith cannot reasonably be regarded as a Jewish version of the speculative thought of Plato and Aristotle, or even the practical, moral reflection of Socrates. In attempting to isolate what is distinctive about Christianity, Climacus first attempts to characterize pagan thought under the Platonic-Socratic principle of immanence: essentially the truth is *within* human beings already.

Socrates as a teacher honestly and consistently expressed this principle by his maieutic method; he helps others "give birth" by discovering the truth for themselves. In such a case Socrates's own significance as a teacher is vanishing, as is the significance of the "moment" the learner gives birth. For the learner who really discovers the truth simultaneously discovers that the truth was already *his* possession (thus he essentially owes Socrates nothing) and

that the truth is an eternal possession (hence the moment the discovery is made is of vanishing significance).[2]

In characterizing pagan thought in that manner, Climacus is referring to much more than the Platonic theory of recollection. In speaking about "the truth" he is referring to "ultimate or essential truth." The person who has the truth in this sense has fulfilled his destiny; he has become all that a human being can be. The principle of immanence then designates any religious view which holds that the divine is already within humans, that they are essentially grounded in God, whether God be understood personally or impersonally. And with a little imagination one can even extend Climacus's analyses to forms of religious humanism that limit themselves to "this-worldly" hopes, or even to political ideologies such as Marxism. For these views would essentially agree with Socrates that the truth is "within" human nature in the sense that human persons can discover and achieve their destiny essentially by themselves and through their own efforts. (Of course the Marxist would not say that the individual person can do this, but would affirm that it is possible for humankind through historical action.)

In contradistinction to this principle of immanence found in paganism, Climacus explicates Christianity by a set of coherent concepts, which he pretends to be developing in the form of an "experiment" to see if there is really any alternative to immanence. Such an alternative must emphasize the importance of "the moment"; rather than viewing the truth as an eternal possession, the essential truth must be something that humans can acquire (or fail to acquire) in time. Since the truth must be acquired, it follows that the human condition is that of lacking the truth, of being essentially in error, a condition that Climacus decides to call "sin." In such a case the learner will need more than a maieutic teacher; he will need a teacher who can totally transform him by giving him the ability to understand the truth. Only the God himself could so re-create the person; hence the teacher must be the God himself.

In developing these concepts, Climacus suggests that the God's historical appearance would be essential if a total transformation of the person is to be effected. For only in this way would individuals get the God "outside themselves," so to speak. If the God relates to humans through the person's immanent moral and religious consciousness, then that moral and religious consciousness is not essentially in untruth. If the human condition is essentially that of untruth, then there is a need for a transcendent, authoritative revelation.

Thus the early Christians proclaimed Christianity as true by divine authority; they affirmed Jesus as *lord*. Climacus makes no attempt to argue

that they were right in doing so, or that Christianity is true. He is simply attempting to make clear what Christianity is by exploring the meaning of a set of concepts which cohere and which clearly are different from pagan thought. These concepts include "the moment," sin, the incarnation, and authority.

The sting of his account is felt only when applied to the Hegelians who proclaimed that their speculative interpretation of Christianity was essentially Christian. For their interpretation of Christianity was within the principle of immanence. On the Hegelian account, Jesus could not be God in any unique sense. Jesus may have been special as the first person to recognize the essential oneness of humans with God, but once this truth was recognized, it was also recognized that it is true at all times of all human beings. The divinity of the human race is being concretely actualized through history.

The Hegelian theologians claimed to be Christian, to have made an advance on pagan thought. Climacus's response is clear. "To make an advance upon Socrates and yet say essentially the same things as he, only not nearly so well—that at least is not Socratic" (PF 111). The Hegelian view may well be true, or more true than Christianity, but Climacus says it is unjust to call it Christianity.

> For someone to prefer paganism to Christianity is not confusing at all, but to discover paganism as the highest development within Christianity does injustice to Christianity, because it becomes something other than what it is, and to paganism, which becomes nothing at all, though it really was something. (CUP 1:361)

It is important to note that Climacus's attack, if justified, applies not only to Hegelianism, but to a tremendous amount of classical liberal theology, and even to a large amount of theology today. For the Hegelians were certainly not the only ones to deny Jesus' divinity and transform Christianity into either a speculative doctrine or moral teaching (or both) whose truth can be recognized through immanent moral and religious human consciousness. Such a view, which obviates any need for an authoritative revelation or transcendent acts by God in history, is widely prevalent even today. Though there are many different forms of this, as widely different in their essentially moral teaching as Marxist revolution and individualist bourgeois conformism, the acceptance of the principle of immanence is common. Climacus's question to these "immanent" versions of Christianity is still pertinent: Why do you call your view Christianity?

The Incarnation: Can Christians Reject It?

I should like in this section to apply these thoughts to *The Myth of God Incarnate*.[3] This book created a great stir when it was originally published, with a flurry of responses that have now disappeared. Though some might think the controversy is now old hat, I believe that the issues raised by this book perfectly illustrate some of the dilemmas facing theology today, and the views defended in the book have hardly disappeared. Hence it is still worth our attention.

In one sense this book is an honest expression of the policy recommended in this essay. The contributors to the volume can no longer accept the belief that Jesus is God in a unique or authoritative sense. They therefore wish the Church to frankly reject this traditional belief. Their candidness in saying so frankly and forcefully what others may think is to be applauded. But some troubling questions remain, which—again to their credit—are posed by the contributors themselves.

The first question concerns what is implied by rejecting the view that Jesus was God incarnate. It is common, unfortunately, in a great deal of contemporary theological literature to be less than completely consistent on this point. A thinker will deny Jesus' divinity and then fall all over himself in affirming Jesus' moral perfection, the uniqueness of Jesus' teaching, and the significance of Jesus as God's supreme revelation to man. A thinker will claim that the belief that Jesus is God is a "myth," but then go on to affirm the usefulness, validity or even inescapability of the myth as a "symbol" or "image" to be employed in the life of the Church. To their credit, the contributors to *Myth* take this problem seriously.

It is this very concern that Dennis Nineham voices in his "Epilogue." Nineham argues that the claims that Jesus was morally perfect, a man whose concern was totally for others, a man whose life centered totally upon God, are not historically warranted. Such claims may be *consistent* with the historical record and thus plausible to those who accept Jesus' divinity, since the attributes seem to be legitimately deducible from his divinity. But it seems unwarranted for one who has rejected Christ's divinity, especially on the basis of a critical historical method, to go on claiming that these assertions about Jesus are historically justified.

In a brief response, Don Cupitt accepts the force of this warning and draws the consequences consistently:

> I acknowledge the limitations of our critical-historical knowledge of Jesus. However, the core of a religion does not lie in the biography or personal-

> ity of the founder, but in the specifically religious values to which, according to the tradition, he bore witness. By these values I mean possible determinations of the human spirit whereby it relates itself to the ultimate goal of existence.[4]

Cupitt believes it to be contingently the case that the historical Jesus proclaimed the "principles of spirit" which lie at the core of Christianity, but it is obviously not necessary to prove this or even to believe it.[5] The validity of these "possible determinations of the human spirit" is independent of any such historically contingent facts. The striking thing about this assertion is that it is an explicit embracement of the Socratic-Platonic "principle of immanence" which Kierkegaard used as his baseline in attempting to clarify the difference between Christian and pagan thought.

This conclusion leads to the second troubling question. (Again, let me stress that this question is raised and acknowledged by the contributors themselves.) I have been appreciative of the candidness of *Myth*'s contributors explicitly rejecting the doctrine and language of incarnation.[6] This rejection may have consequences that are indeed extreme. Does a set of doctrines of this sort have a right to call itself "Christian"? Is not an affirmation of such doctrines an affirmation of truths that are regarded as valid independently of whether or not they were taught by Jesus Christ or his apostles? Are not these truths essentially "possible determinations of the human spirit" which could be and perhaps actually have been recognized in the teachings of other religions and founders?[7]

I take it that contributors to *Myth* are by no means unwilling to face these questions and answer them. They themselves recognize that Christianity without the incarnation will be inconceivable to many, and that their very proposal will seem contradictory. Yet they suggest that what seems to be the case may not be. I would like to tentatively suggest that even after deeper thought their proposal is self-contradictory.

Let us take the relation of Christianity to other religions as one problem area. It is clear that *Myth*'s view entails a change in the way Christians view other religions. Indeed, it seems that the consequences entailed here are thought by the writers of *Myth* to be a point in favor of their view. As John Hick, for example, says, it is an embarrassment in today's world to affirm that Jesus was literally God's son and that salvation is made possible only through faith in him. Such an idea is "excessively parochial, presenting God in effect as the tribal deity of the predominantly Christian West."[8] It is far more reasonable to believe that God is acting savingly in all the different religions of mankind, Christianity being merely one of them.

Such a view may well be more reasonable and believable than orthodoxy. It may well be true. I am not attempting to decide that question. My question is simply: Is some such view justified in calling itself "Christianity"?

What's in a name? Don't people have a right to use language as they wish? Of course. But if they are interested in contributing to clarity and responsible thought, they will be careful in their use of words. As a matter of fact, there still is a numerically large group of people who hold that Jesus was uniquely God's son. These people take seriously concepts like "the moment," sin, authority, and incarnation. They see the truth of Christianity as resting essentially upon an authoritative, historical revelation, rather than upon a person's immanent moral and religious consciousness. For them salvation is found through faith and obedience to Jesus Christ and in him alone. Such people can be found in virtually every Christian denomination and in every part of the world (including especially non-Western areas such as Africa and Asia). These people call their set of beliefs "Christianity."

In terms of our original categories of unbelievers, believers, and adaptors, such people are clearly believers, while the contributors to *The Myth of God Incarnate* are adaptors. Is it not the case that these believers have a legitimate grievance against the adaptors? The believers use the term "Christianity" to designate the view that Jesus is uniquely God's son, that salvation is found through faith in him, and that his life and teachings are transcendent and authoritative. They mean thereby to exclude or negate views which regard Jesus as merely a man, however striking and different a man he may have been. They mean to exclude views which hold that salvation is not essentially dependent upon Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. To sum up, they mean to exclude precisely the views put forward by authors of *The Myth of God Incarnate* as Christianity. That the view of these believers really is *different* is undeniable.

It is obviously intolerable to have the same word designate positions that logically exclude each other. Hence, if the usage of the authors of *Myth* is accepted, the people who call themselves believers will simply have to find a new name for their view. To some extent this is already being done for them. John Hick stigmatizes them as "theological fundamentalists," for example in his essay in *Myth*.[9] To some extent, the believers are doing this for themselves, by adding qualifying adjectives: "orthodox Christian," "evangelical Christian." Perhaps some wholly new conventions could be developed. For example, the believers could call themselves "followers of Jesus" and their view "the Way" (as did some early believers in Acts), leaving the names Christian and Christianity for the adaptors. These sorts of linguistic shifts are possible, and perhaps something like this will be necessary.

So long as we know what we mean by the terms, no great harm will be done. But unfortunately language has a history and words have connotations. The believer thinks that he is the contemporary representative of a tradition, that he stands in a long line of people who affirmed Jesus as Lord and claimed that salvation depends on Jesus alone. Regardless of the historical arguments of *The Myth of God Incarnate* as to how these beliefs arose, it is undeniable that these beliefs have characterized the main body of Christian believers from the early Church to the twentieth century. In appropriating the term "Christian," the adaptors are making a claim to be the legitimate heirs of this tradition and are supplanting the believers from their relationship to this tradition.

If traditional Christianity seems unbelievable to a person, why cannot he say so plainly? It is ironical that many adaptors pride themselves on their developed logical conscience. They do not believe things which fly in the face of modern science; they are faithful to scientific, historical criticism. Yet it seems not to trouble them to appropriate language designed to exclude their position and use it to designate their position, regardless of the fact that this manuever seems calculated to produce confusion. The psychological comfort this produces seems to me to be purchased at too high a price.

Can the Incarnation Be Retained as Myth?

Some perhaps will respond that the incarnation is indeed an essential aspect of Christianity. Perhaps those who cannot accept the traditional doctrine as true can maintain it is "myth." Several of the contributors to *Myth* wish to retain the traditional Christian formulations in the guise of "symbols" and "imagery," or "myth" itself, to avoid a complete break with the past. John Hick, for example, says that the idea of divine incarnation is a myth, and he defines a myth like this: "A myth is a story which is told but which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to someone or something but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers."[10] Thus traditional doctrines are to be taken not as "literal statements" but as "symbols." Frances Young suggests that it is necessary for the Christian believer to operate with two models in his dealings with reality: a scientific model which explains happenings as the result of natural causes and "'mythological' or symbolic models, models which however inadequately represent the religious and spiritual dimensions of our experience."[11] Even if we cannot literally believe in the incarnation any more, Young feels it could function in a symbolic way.

First of all, I should like to object to the oversimple categories of "literal" and "symbolic" used here. All statements, even statements of scientific theories, are symbolic in that they employ symbols. Indeed it is increasingly recognized how significant metaphor is for so-called literal discourse. And of course orthodox theologians have recognized that much, if not all, of our religious language fails to express the truth at which it aims. The believer here seems to be presented with two unpalatable alternatives with these categories of literal and symbolic. Either he must accept an excessively anthropomorphic and literal-minded view of religious language, or else accept the thesis that religious language is symbolic. But this latter category seems to imply an attitude of "anything goes."

It is obvious that I cannot begin to give an adequate treatment of the concepts of myth and symbol in this brief compass. The former category has been voluminously dealt with in contemporary theology, and the latter deservedly holds a central place in aesthetics and logical theory. But to assess the sorts of claims made by Hick and Young, a few distinctions may be in order. A beginning might be made by separating out myths and symbols that are completely noncognitive and even nondiscursive. In certain religious practices, ecstatic experiences, and exercises, there may well be "pure" symbols which have a legitimate function, but which resist analysis of any kind. It would be stupid to ask whether such symbols are true or false, or even what they "mean."

The great majority of religious symbols would seem to be at least discussible, however. I think that the following categorization is helpful, at least as a start. Some religious symbols can be viewed as "parables" or "stories," which are intended to illustrate or evoke some morally praiseworthy action or way of life. Other symbols may be viewed as "dramatizations," which may have the function of parables but which fulfill that function by picturing in dramatic form some truth about the nature of things. Finally there are symbols which are "conceptualizations"; here I have in mind accounts which are primarily intended to state or explain or clarify some metaphysical truth, though the fact that the truth is metaphysical may entail that language is "stretched" and not limited to straightforward univocal meaning.

Parables, Dramas, and Conceptualizations

As an example of "parable," I would cite the parable of the good Samaritan. The religious value of the good Samaritan story is not dependent on the historical truth that there actually was a Samaritan who found a man beaten by robbers. The story represents a moral possibility; its value would be essen-

tially the same whether that possibility has ever been actualized. I could still, through the parable, come to learn something about what it means to be a neighbor, and who my neighbor is.

For some Christians, the creation story in Genesis might serve as a good example of a dramatization. There are some similarities to the parable. For those who consider the creation account nonhistorical, it may be unimportant whether God actually took dust from the ground and made a man, for example. The truth expressed in this part of the drama is that a human being is fully part of the natural order. Like the parable, the drama may have the function of illustrating or evoking morally praiseworthy actions and attitudes. (Prideful self-sufficiency is to be avoided, for example.) But the important difference between parable and drama is this: the dramatization accomplishes these functions through communicating in a poetic and pictorial way some ontological truth. In the case of the creation story the truth is that humans and the whole natural order are dependent upon God for their very being. Unless this is so, this drama is an inappropriate one to employ, and the attitudes and actions it illustrates or evokes may not be morally praiseworthy at all.

In *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Maurice Wiles makes a similar point. He makes a careful attempt to distinguish different types of myths and different usages of the term "myth." The sense of myth that he finds most appropriate to understand Christian doctrines seems close to what I have termed "dramatization." Wiles distinguishes between true and false interpretations of myth by claiming that for a true interpretation "there must be some ontological truth corresponding to the central characteristic of the myth."[12]

It seems clear to me, however, that in order to speak of dramatizations as being true or false in this way, there must be at least one more kind of theological discourse. It must be possible in a more direct, albeit abstract way, to state ontological theses. Otherwise, one could not discuss and evaluate the meaning and appropriateness of dramatizations. This kind of religious discourse is what I term a "conceptualization." As an example of this, we might take the prologue to John's gospel. The author here is obviously attempting to say something, through the admittedly frail vehicle of human language, which he believes to be true of the universe in its most ultimate character, namely that the divine Word, through which the universe was created by God, is identical with the man Jesus. This particular conceptualization is a mixed thesis; it affirms something about God and something about a historical person and claims that both statements are about the same person. Conceptualizations may, like dramas and parables, evoke or illustrate attitudes and actions, but this should be a direct function of the truth of the

conceptualization. Thus, if the prologue to John's gospel expresses a truth, then it would be appropriate to pray to Jesus and acknowledge him as Lord—otherwise such an attitude would be idolatrous.

The Incarnation as Parable and as Drama

Let us now apply these categories to the doctrine of the incarnation and see which is most appropriate. How well would this doctrine function as noncognitive symbol, as parable, as dramatization, and as conceptualization?

We may dismiss the noncognitive symbol fairly quickly. Of course, it is possible someone might employ the phrase Jesus is God as a mantra, but if the usage is totally noncognitive, one could obviously not *evaluate* the appropriateness of the usage (at least not according to logical criteria). In the nature of the case, it would be impossible to say that this mantra was more true or even more appropriate than any number of others.

As a parable, the incarnation seems singularly inappropriate. *Without* the doctrine of the incarnation, Jesus' biography (or at least a historically sanitized version minus a few embarrassing claims) might very well function as a parable. The point of telling the story of Jesus' life might be to illustrate a moral possibility and to evoke certain actions and attitudes on the part of the hearer. But we are not discussing the possible function stories about Jesus might have if the doctrine of the incarnation were rejected, but the question as to whether or not the incarnation story itself could function as a parable if the literal truth of the doctrine were rejected. And here it seems that the doctrine of the incarnation is particularly inappropriate, even if we disregard all questions of factual truth and look at the story of Jesus' life—as told in John's Gospel, for instance—only as a possibility. For the moral possibility which is illustrated in the "incarnation" version of the story seems to be a form of colossal egomania, even to the point of insanity. What is represented is the claim of an individual person to be the unique preexistent son of God. Unless that person is what he claims to be, the only legitimate function of such a parable would seem to be to evoke an attitude of horror or pity on the part of the hearers as they recognized the blasphemous attempt on the part of an individual to equate himself with God. If, on the other hand, the claim made by Jesus is regarded as true, then the parable is no longer functioning as a parable, and what is pictured is not simply a moral possibility to be emulated. In either case, it would be wrong for the hearers to take Jesus as a model and attempt to emulate him with respect to his designation as divine.

The next possibility is that of dramatization. Here it is important to recall that the evaluation of the drama is dependent on the truth of what is

supposed to be dramatized. The evaluation of the incarnation as a dramatization will then be a function of the interpretation given the drama. Here we must separate two questions: first, the appropriateness of the interpretation, and secondly, the truth of the interpretation. That is, it is possible for someone to interpret the incarnation badly in the sense that his interpretation comports badly with the drama itself, but nevertheless state something that is ontologically true. Conversely, it is possible for someone to interpret the incarnation appropriately, but offer in his interpretation a false ontological thesis.

It is impossible to give or find a general assessment of the incarnation as drama, since each assessment must be directed to the particular interpretation offered. Nevertheless, some comments can be made in a general way about what sorts of interpretations are appropriate. It is important not to allow confusion to creep in here by altering the doctrine itself; that is, we must first accurately state the drama as a drama before considering possible interpretations and their validity. We are considering the traditional doctrine of the incarnation, that is, the thesis that Jesus Christ was the unique preexistent son of God. If the statement that "Jesus is God" is taken to mean something totally different, then the whole procedure of testing the value of the doctrine of the incarnation as drama becomes pointless. For it is not the traditional doctrine that is being tested at all. For example, suppose one says that "Jesus was God" means only that "Jesus fully embodied God's ideals for man" or that "Jesus illustrates the human ability to live in a godlike manner." If *that* is the doctrine of the incarnation, then it is quite possible to accept the doctrine straightforwardly. There is no need to regard the doctrine as a myth. And of course one might conceivably want to say similar things about some other historical figures such as Socrates or the Buddha. If one has doubts about the historical character of Jesus, one can legitimately convert this "incarnation" from a drama into a parable. But one should recognize that what is being employed as a parable in this case is *not* the traditional doctrine of the incarnation. What we have, rather, is a parable that illustrates the human capacity for godlikeness.

This is another example of the misuse of language, which we treated earlier. For the developers and maintainers of the doctrine of the incarnation meant by their original conceptualization to designate a view that held that Jesus was uniquely God in a way that no other human being was. The incarnation was understood as a response to humans' sinful, ungodly character, which necessitated a transcendent act by God which immanence could never have discovered. It follows from this that anyone who uses the term "incarnation" to designate the thesis that humans in general have the potential for

divinity is *denying* that Jesus was uniquely God and that humans are inherently sinful and ungodlike. Such a person is thus using incarnation to designate the precise opposite of its traditional meaning.

This seems to me to entail that someone who says "Jesus was God" and means by that only that Jesus embodied godly ideals cannot really claim that he is reflecting on the traditional doctrine at all, but on a different doctrine altogether. For he is implying that humans as such are capable of godlikeness. If such a person also says that we must *reject* the doctrine of the incarnation or regard it as myth, he is being radically inconsistent in his linguistic usage. The traditional doctrine of the incarnation (understood in its old sense) is claimed to be false, whereupon we are told that the traditional doctrine can be retained as a story or dramatization. But what is *retained* under the title of "incarnation" is precisely the opposite of what was *rejected* as "incarnation." If the incarnation is only a moral/speculative doctrine about human godlike capacities, there would be no need for having rejected the doctrine at all. But having rejected the doctrine (which is an understandable move since its traditional meaning is fairly clear), it is confusing and dishonest to claim that it can be retained as myth and offer as the myth the exact *opposite* of the doctrine of the incarnation. It follows that a clear statement of the meaning of the traditional doctrine of the incarnation rules out certain interpretations of it, *even if the doctrine itself is only viewed as a drama*, that is, even if the incarnation is untrue in the traditional sense, but only a dramatic representation of some ontological truth. Certain interpretations of the drama which are offered are radically inappropriate to the drama itself, however true such moral/speculative doctrines about human beings may be in themselves.

Though a range of interpretations of the drama may be possible, interpretations which understand the incarnation as an affirmation of human godlike capacities seem inappropriate. And it is important to remember that dramas (as distinct from parables) must dramatize or imaginatively express some ontological truth. Even as drama the main point of the incarnation would seem to be humankind's lack of godliness and consequent need for God's own redemptive activity. It is God's redemptive activity that is being dramatized—not the inherent godlikeness of human persons.

We shall limit ourselves then to interpretations of the incarnation as drama, which in some way recognize Christ's unique metaphysical status—and not consider views that treat him merely as an example of what humans can achieve. Here we have a variety of possible views which in one way or another interpret the thesis that God was somehow uniquely in Christ. It is impossible to adequately characterize and evaluate these in detail. The vari-

ous interpretations can be arranged on a continuum with views which come close to seeing Jesus as a mere man on one side and views which completely accept the Chalcedonian formulation on the other. The more unique and godlike Jesus is, the more he is interpreted as having a special relationship to God, the closer the relationship between Jesus and God, the more appropriate the interpretation seems to be as an interpretation of the incarnation. These interpretations emphasize the alienation of human beings from God and the need for God's activity. In short, while I would not wish to claim that interpretations which fall short of the traditional understanding are totally inappropriate, it does seem to me that those interpretations which resemble the traditional view, minus the essential connection with history which the concept of drama rules out as necessary, would be appropriate.

There is, however, an objection to viewing the incarnation as drama that seems decisive to me. It emerges when we combine the word "Jesus" with the claim that the drama's truth is not essentially connected with history. What connection can there be between drama and history? If the drama interpreted properly is supposed to be grounded in historical fact, then it seems to be more than a drama. We have rather something that sounds more like an attempt to understand Jesus' life, another attempt at understanding what it means to affirm Jesus as Lord. In such a case there is no need to claim that the traditional doctrine is being *rejected* as doctrine at all. We have rather a legitimate attempt to reinterpret the traditional doctrine, which attempt may, of course, be more or less adequate.

If on the other hand the connection between the drama and history is *severed*, the result seems paradoxical. For now the claim is that the truth illustrated by the drama (which presumably concerns human alienation from God and the need for divine intervention) is asserted to be recognizable as true by human moral and religious consciousness, independent of any transcendent revelation by God in history. But that is the basic truth, which we found to be inconsistent with the incarnation, even interpreted as drama. The only way to avoid this would be to admit that the truth is recognizable only through some other supernatural act of God, not by human consciousness alone. This is similar to what some neo-orthodox theologians have claimed. But such a transcendent act of God is at least qualitatively similar to the traditional supernatural acts that the contemporary critic of the tradition wishes to regard as historically false or impossible. If God can supernaturally act to give a human being an understanding of saving truth today, it is hard to see why he might not have acted in history to accomplish the same purpose. In any case, if human moral and religious consciousness is capable of recognizing the essential truth about God without supernatural help, then it

would seem that human moral and religious consciousness in not essentially alienated from God, and hence the incarnation dramatizes something false. We are back to immanence and Socrates. Minus the historical element or some similar contemporary act by God, the interpretation, however good as an interpretation, turns out to embody not truth but falsehood.

The Incarnation as Conceptualization

It seems to me that the incarnation fits best in the last of our categories; its meaning and function are best viewed as a "conceptualization." It is, however, important to regard it as a conceptualization rooted in God's transcendent revelation; hence there remains an essential tie to the historical. Historicity lies at the heart of the traditional doctrine, and its abandonment always involves a return to immanence.

Calling the incarnation a conceptualization does not imply that the doctrine must be understood literally, whatever that means in such a context. For example, someone who holds that Jesus is God's son does not have to believe that God physically begat him. (No more than saying God's eye is upon us implies that God has eyebrows.) After all, metaphor plays an important role in numerous realms of human discourse, including aesthetics and scientific theory. What is implied is that picturing Jesus as God's son does more justice to the truth than any other possible image we might employ. While no human language may be perfectly adequate to capture the mystery of Jesus' oneness with God, the person who uses the traditional language is coming as close to the truth as finite human beings can. It is possible to attempt to reinterpret this truth in philosophical categories other than those of Chalcedon. But if the incarnation is essentially a conceptualization, then it is wrongheaded and confused to repudiate the meaning that is present in the conceptualization and then attempt to hang on to the image.

Let us respect the unbeliever who honestly tells us what he can believe and what he cannot and why. Let us respect the believer who honestly believes, having carefully considered the difficulties and problems. Let no one attempt to stifle anyone's attempt to reinterpret and develop religious teachings in the light of new problems and new data. But every individual should examine himself and honestly ask if clarity and understanding are served by his use of traditional religious language. Kierkegaard's criticism of the speculative reinterpretations of Christianity is still relevant:

> Speculation, remaining in immanence, which is recollection's way of escaping from existence at every point, leads to a volatilization. By means

of the art of not saying anything decisive about what is most decisive, . . . but using the expression of decision merely as a manner of speaking, speculation becomes a pagan reminiscence, against which there is no objection if it straightforwardly breaks with Christianity, but much to object to if it is supposed to be Christianity. (CUP 1:217)

PART THREE

Kierkegaard on Faith, Reason, and Reformed Epistemology

Chapter 7

Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox, and Faith

If some philosophers had not existed, the history of philosophy would have to invent them. After all, what would the introduction to philosophy teacher do without good old Berkeley, the notorious denier of commonsense, or Hume, the infamous skeptic. In some cases, in fact, philosophers *have* been invented by the history of philosophy. I do not mean to suggest that historians of philosophy have actually altered the past by bringing into being real flesh and blood philosophers. Rather, I mean to say that the textbook caricatures of famous philosophers are often a creation of the tradition, encrusted layers of hoary myths and legends which hold the actual philosopher prisoner, the myths of Berkeley and Hume to which I just alluded being excellent examples.

One can easily see that someone engaged in demythologizing one of these venerable philosophical legends does not have an easy task. He can expect fierce resistance, since he deprives the tradition of one of its stock examples and whipping boys. Nevertheless, my task in this paper is to do just that. For no stereotype in the tradition is as deeply embedded as that of Kierkegaard as the arch-irrationalist, yet my thesis is that properly understood, Kierkegaard is not a foe of reason.

To have any chance of success, I must of course qualify that brash remark. In some sense Kierkegaard is a critic of reason or understanding, just as Berkeley does in one sense contravene common sense, and Hume is in one sense a skeptic. I shall argue, however, that Kierkegaard's critique of reason is

not in the deepest sense irrational, and that the usual understanding of his fideism as a rejection of logical consistency is profoundly mistaken.

To dispel a myth, one must articulate it first. Fortunately or unfortunately, it is not difficult to find versions of the myth of Kierkegaard as an irrationalist. Some have found Kierkegaard to be an irrationalist because they have seen him as a proponent of radical choices, arbitrary acts of will which are supposed to be the foundation of ethical life.[1] Kierkegaard has been stigmatized as an irrationalist because he is seen as someone who attempts to justify a repudiation of rational, universalizable ethical principles in favor of private, essentially nonrational divine commands.[2] The majority of readers, however, who have seen Kierkegaard as an irrationalist have surely based their charge on the Kierkegaardian claim that Christian faith involves belief in a paradox.

The Paradox as a Formal Contradiction

If Kierkegaard's irrationalism exists anywhere, it clearly is present in his insistence that Christian faith is faith in the incarnation, the fact of the God-man, which he sees as the "Absolute Paradox." The paradox is called the absurd, and it brings with itself the "possibility of offense," through which an individual must pass to become a Christian.[3] That Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms[4] say these things is clear; what is less clear is what is meant by them.

Two contrasting traditions of interpretation have emerged over the years. Many writers, beginning with David Swenson and continuing with such commentators as Alastair MacKinnon, Cornelio Fabro, and N. H. Søe,[5] have claimed that Kierkegaard is not really an irrationalist, because Kierkegaard's paradox is not a formal, logical contradiction. For them Kierkegaard is asserting that Christianity is above reason, not against reason.

Other writers, both purported friends of Kierkegaard such as Alastair Hannay,[6] as well as rabid critics, such as Brand Blanshard,[7] have interpreted the paradox as a logical contradiction. For these writers, when Kierkegaard asks for faith in the paradox, he is asking the respondent to abandon the laws of logic and to embrace something which he knows is false, even impossible. Herbert Garelick is typical of many: "This Paradox is the ultimate challenge to the intellect, for all attempts to understand it must conform to the laws of judgment and discourse: identity, contradiction, and excluded middle. Yet the Paradox violates these laws. . . . Rationally, the statement 'God-man' is a nonsensical statement."[8] Clearly, on this reading, the leap of faith is more properly described as being against reason than above reason.

In this chapter I shall try to give a convincing demonstration that Garelick and others who share his reading of Kierkegaard are wrong. I shall show that Kierkegaard does not mean a formal, logical contradiction when he speaks of the paradox of the incarnation. That, however, is only half of my task. I must then explain what Kierkegaard does mean by "paradox" in a manner that does justice to his claim that there is a tension between reason and the paradox. I must account for the tension between reason and the paradox while at the same time showing that this tension is not a necessary opposition.

A case that Kierkegaard does mean a formal, logical contradiction can of course be made. Sometimes the case hinges on the commentator's assumption that the incarnation is a logical contradiction. Someone who believes this will naturally assume that Kierkegaard must have discerned this as well. Louis Pojman, for example, says that the paradox is "the uniquely absurd proposition that has the most objective evidence against it."[9] The objective evidence against the paradox is simply that it is or entails a logical contradiction. The argument that this is so relies on Pojman's own view of God and human persons. Since God is infinite, eternal, and unchanging, and human beings are finite, noneternal, and changing, "God and man are mutually exclusive genuses."[10]

Support for Pojman's argument here is provided by the fact that Kierkegaard frequently does describe God as unchanging and eternal, and does lay great emphasis on human finitude and temporality. One may well conclude from this that God and man *appear* to be mutually exclusive genuses. However, what appears to be the case is not always the case, and there are reasons to be cautious about drawing the conclusion Pojman draws here. One is that two of the qualities Pojman alludes to, eternality and temporality, are consistently said by Kierkegaard to be the constituents of human life generally, not just the incarnation.[11] (It is important to note here that Kierkegaard does not equate temporality with being noneternal, as Pojman illicitly assumes.) The paradoxicalness of the incarnation thus mirrors a paradoxicalness which is generically present in human existence, and no one has suggested that Kierkegaard understands human existence itself as a logical contradiction, even though he does describe existence as a "contradiction."[12]

It is true that Kierkegaard's writings, particularly under the Climacus pseudonym, contain many claims that the paradox is a contradiction; the incarnation is even described as a self-contradiction (PF 87). The logical or formalist reading of contradiction is supported by the frequent claims that the contradiction consists in the fact that what is eternal has become temporal or historical. The strongest statement to this effect is in *Postscript*, where

Johannes Climacus says that the contradiction consists in the fact that the eternal can only become historical by "going against its own nature" (CUP 1:512). The paradox is, moreover, often designated as the "absurd."[13]

Why the Paradox Is Not a Formal Contradiction

Despite this support for the "against reason" view, I think an overwhelmingly strong case can be made for the claim that Kierkegaard does not mean "logical contradiction" when he claims that the incarnation is a paradox. The evidence for this is of two kinds: textual evidence and more general arguments derived from an overall understanding of Kierkegaard's project.

Textual Evidence

The first point which must be taken into account is that the terms "contradiction" (*Modsigelse*) and "self-contradiction" (*Selvmodigelse*) are not normally used by Kierkegaard to refer to what we would today term a logical contradiction, though he sometimes uses the terms in that sense, particularly when talking about the logical principle of contradiction (about which I will say more later). Thus, the mere fact that Kierkegaard often refers to the paradox as a contradiction means very little. Kierkegaard's usage may seem sloppy to a contemporary reader, but he is here, as at so many points, following the Hegelians, who notoriously used the term "contradiction" in a very broad manner.[14] Kierkegaard regularly uses "contradiction" to refer to what might today be designated as an "incongruity," with formal, logical contradictions seen as a species of the incongruous.

This can be clearly seen in Kierkegaard's main discussions of humor and the comical in Climacus's writings and elsewhere. The comical is defined as a "painless contradiction" (CUP 1:459) and in a lengthy footnote which follows, Climacus gives numerous examples of contradictions, none of which are formal or logical contradictions. A caricature is said to be comical because of the "contradiction between likeness and unlikeness." A man who falls into a cellar while looking up at a window is said to be comical because of the contradiction between his upward gaze and downward ascent. A fairy-tale character described as seven and one-quarter yards tall is said to be comical because the exactness implied by the use of the fraction is contradictory to the distance from reality which is associated with the fairy tale. All of these contradictions are clearly cases of incongruity, not formal, logical contradictions.

Furthermore, when Kierkegaard does speak of formal, logical contradictions, it is invariably in the context of a defense of the Aristotelian position

that the law of noncontradiction must be upheld. Kierkegaard's whole polemic against Hegel is that there are genuine either-ors; not every opposition can be intellectually mediated so that one can reach the position of both-and. This polemic depends on a resolute defense of the principle of non-contradiction and the consequent existence of absolute distinctions. In *Philosophical Fragments*, for example, Climacus says that it is "an unshakable insistence on the absolute and on absolute distinctions that makes a person a good dialectician," (108) though this has been forgotten in our age because of our failure to take the principle of noncontradiction seriously. Aristotle's argument that one must assume the principle of noncontradiction even to deny it is put forward to blast the theology of Climacus's day, which by denying the principle was able to have its cake and eat it too on many crucial issues. Climacus, in an allusion to *King Lear*, crisply affirms that saying yes and no at the same time is not good theology (53).

Not only does Climacus defend the law of noncontradiction. He explicitly distinguishes between a formal, logical self-contradiction and the kind of contradiction which constitutes the paradox. In the course of his discussion of the incarnation, Climacus analyzes how people become believers or disciples. The contemporary generation of believers will obviously receive the condition of faith directly from the God. But what about subsequent generations? Is it possible that they receive the condition of faith from their historical predecessors, who have passed on to them the historical report? Climacus denies this is possible, and the ground of his denial is that this proposal is self-contradictory and "meaningless," *in a different sense than the paradox itself is said to be contradictory* (PF 101). If the later disciple received the condition of faith from the earliest generation, this would in effect make the earlier generation the God, which contradicts the supposition that the earlier generation had received the condition from the God and was therefore not itself the God.

> That meaninglessness [that the later generation receives the condition of faith from the earlier generation], however, is unthinkable in a different sense than when we state that that fact [the incarnation] and the single individual's relation to the God are unthinkable. Our hypothetical assumption of that fact and the single individual's relation to the God contains no self-contradiction, and thus thought can become preoccupied with it as with the strangest possible thing. That meaningless consequence, however, contains a self-contradiction; it is not satisfied with positing something unreasonable, which is our hypothetical assumption, but within this unreasonableness it produces a self-contradiction: that the God is the God for the contemporary, but the contemporary in turn is the God for a third party. (PF 101)

I believe that the same distinction between a formal contradiction and the kind of contradiction which is found in the paradox is clearly found in *Practice in Christianity* (124–25) and somewhat less clearly in *Postscript* (1:504), in a famous passage where he attempts to distinguish between nonsense and the incomprehensible.

Arguments from Kierkegaard's General Strategy

Seeing that the paradox is not for Kierkegaard a formal contradiction is not merely a matter of proof-texting. Reflection on Kierkegaard's overall perspective shows how inappropriate it is to think of the incarnation as such a contradiction. One of the key points in Kierkegaard's view of the incarnation is its uniqueness. The incarnation is not just a paradox; it is the Absolute Paradox and as such is absolutely unique. Explaining what Kierkegaard means by this is no easy matter, and it is still more difficult, perhaps impossible, to show that he succeeded in showing such uniqueness. Nevertheless, it is obvious that such uniqueness is not served by treating the paradoxicalness of the incarnation as a formal contradiction. Such contradictions are not only not unique; they can be generated at will. Even Louis Pojman sees this and raises it as a criticism of Kierkegaard,[15] but it serves rather to undermine his assumption that Kierkegaard must mean by contradiction what Pojman thinks he means.

Even more fundamentally, if the paradox is a formal contradiction and can be known to be such, Climacus has completely undermined his goal. Those who assume that the incarnation is a logical contradiction believe that we have a clear understanding of what it means to be God and what it means to be a human being. God is infinite, eternal, all-knowing; human beings are finite, temporal, limited in their knowledge. Thus we can know that the predicates "God" and "human being" are logically exclusive. All this assumes that we have a reliable, natural knowledge of both God and human beings.

The point of the incarnation, from Kierkegaard's perspective, is precisely to challenge this assumption. The whole of *Philosophical Fragments* is a development of a thought experiment on the following lines. Socrates had proposed that the truth, the eternal truth, which for Kierkegaard means the knowledge of God, was present within human beings already. Climacus tries to think through the logical implications of the assumption that this is false. He wants to explore the contrary assumption that human beings lack the truth about God and therefore must receive that truth from a revelation which comes directly from God. Thus chapter 3, which develops the notion

of the incarnation as a paradox, consistently looks at God as the unknown (39), that which autonomous, unaided human reason cannot know.

The irony here is clear. In order to know that the incarnation is a formal, logical contradiction, we would have to have the kind of knowledge of God that it is the point of the incarnation to deny we possess. One cannot know that a round square is a contradictory concept without a clear concept of roundness and squareness. Similarly, one cannot know that the concept of the God-man is contradictory without a clear concept of both the divine and the human.

The Paradox as Apparent Contradiction

We can now understand what Climacus does mean by a paradox, and also lay a basis for seeing why he thinks that there is a tension between the paradox and human reason. A paradox is an apparent contradiction. In general the discovery of a paradox is the result of an encounter with a reality which our concepts are inadequate to deal with, a reality that ties us in a conceptual knot. When we try to understand it we find ourselves saying self-contradictory things, but this does not mean that the reality we have encountered is itself self-contradictory. It means that there is a problem with our conceptual equipment.

If one is convinced that our conceptual equipment is in order, then the natural response to a paradoxical reality will be to dismiss it. For exactly this reason, those who think our natural understanding of God is adequate will naturally resist the suggestion that we can only understand God through a revelation from God. For such people, the paradox is truly "against reason."

To understand this reaction, consider the parallel case of a mind-body dualist who believes that our concept of consciousness logically entails that thinking must inhere in a non-physical substance which is the subject of consciousness. Suppose this dualist encounters a materialist who believes that the subject of thinking is simply the brain. To the dualist, the notion of a thinking brain is a logical contradiction. The materialist might respond as follows: To you the idea of a thinking brain is paradoxical; it appears to be a contradiction. The problem, however, does not lie in the reality of a thinking brain, but in your constricted concept of the mental.

In exactly the same manner, the believer in the incarnation may respond to the unbeliever: the idea of God becoming a man is paradoxical to you; it appears to be a logical contradiction. The problem lies in your constricted conception of God, and more specifically, in your assumption that you understand who God is and what God can and cannot do.

Of course there must be some carryover between our prior understanding of God and the new understanding which results from our encounter with God in time, just as there must be some carryover from our earlier, dualistic concept of the mental to a materialistic concept of the mental. Otherwise, the term "God" in the expression "God-man" would be utterly meaningless, as would "mind" in the analogous "material mind." But this requirement is compatible with rather drastic conceptual transformations. No one today wishes to argue that it is impossible for an atom to be split on conceptual grounds, yet no concept could originally have been more paradoxical than that of an indivisible, smallest unit of matter being divided.

The Tension between Reason and the Paradox

We are now in a position to see why Kierkegaard frequently talks of faith in the incarnation as against reason, rather than simply being above reason, though he uses the latter language as well. Faith is said to be against reason because all of us are in a position in this matter analogous to the dualist who is offended by the notion of a thinking brain. All of us have a strong tendency to think that our ideas about God, or whatever is ultimate and finally important to us, are adequate, or that if they are not, at least we possess the "condition," the ability to make progress towards such truth.

As a Christian Kierkegaard interprets this confidence in our own rational capacities in this area as sin, since the essence of sin is a prideful assertion of our own independence and autonomy in relation to God. Because he believes in the universality of sin, he naturally thinks that there will be tension between our human thinking—dominated as it is by an assertion of our own autonomy—and Christian faith, which implies that our intellectual capacities in this area are essentially impaired. Climacus, who does not claim to be a Christian, but only to be thinking through a hypothesis, says that, from the point of view of his hypothesis, the same thing must be true. Human beings are sinful, and their sinfulness not only blocks them from a proper understanding of God; it is the reason the paradox is to us human beings a paradox. The difference, the absolute qualitative difference between God and man which makes the idea of the God-man incomprehensible to us is plainly said to derive from human sinfulness (PF 46–47), not the metaphysical qualities cited by Pojman as the heart of the paradox. This does not mean that human beings who were not sinful would find the incarnation understandable. God's ways are not our ways, and even unfallen humans would find God mysterious. However, they would not necessarily think that their failure to understand God showed that God did not exist or that God's

actions were unreasonable. It is fallen reason that pridefully insists that whatever it does not understand must be absurd. Hence, there is a natural tension between human reason and the paradox, but it is a tension which does not rest on any rational knowledge of the nature of God. It rests rather on what one might call the natural self-confidence of reason.

Can Reason Have Limits?

If I am right in my contentions, then the case that Kierkegaard is an irrationalist rests on a misreading of Kierkegaard and has not been effectively made, at least to the degree that the charge is grounded in the view that Kierkegaard urges religious believers to violate the laws of logic. Of course it may still be the case that the label "irrationalist" is an appropriate one for Kierkegaard. Whether that is so, on my reading, depends heavily on whether it is irrational to urge that reason is limited, for that claim *is* certainly one Kierkegaard makes. Is the natural self-confidence of reason healthy self-esteem or arrogant *hubris*?

An assertion that reason is limited is surely not enough in itself to convict a philosopher of irrationalism. Otherwise, Kant and the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, among others, would stand guilty. The answer must surely lie in what the limits are said to be and how they are drawn.

Kierkegaard is often pictured as attempting to save religious belief by locating it in an enclave which is marked "off limits" to reason. The assertion that what lies behind the boundary is impervious to reason is itself made dogmatically. This kind of attitude is foreign to Kierkegaard, though it is present in many who are allegedly influenced by him. He actually stigmatizes the attempt of well-meaning religious people to demarcate a creed, sacred book, or person as an ultimate, unchallengeable authority—as "superstition and narrowness of spirit" (CUP 1:35n). Though he recognizes the human need for something "really firm" that is impervious to rational reflection, he regards this need as a weakness, and says it is incompatible with the kind of subjective concern which he regards as the foundation of the authentic religious life.

Although Kierkegaard argues that the incarnation is something which cannot be rationally understood, he regards this claim as itself one which is subject to rational scrutiny. One cannot rationally understand the paradox, but one can hope to understand rationally why the paradox cannot be understood (CUP 1:514). In other words, the claim that reason has limits must itself be a claim that reason can adjudicate.

It is crucial to recognize that Kierkegaard does not think that the tension between human reason and the paradox is a necessary tension. To maintain its integrity, Christianity must always retain the possibility of offense, but this is only a possibility, not a necessity. For the believer, it is a temptation, but to the degree that one is a believer, it is a temptation which has been surmounted. Faith is described as a happy passion in which reason and the paradox are on good terms. The accord between reason and the paradox is possible in the case where "reason sets itself aside" (PF 59). In other words, there is no conflict between faith and reason if reason can accept the limitations of reason. It is this crucial happy relationship between reason and the paradox which lies in the background of Kierkegaard's statement, often quoted by partisans of the above-reason interpretation of the paradox: "When the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd" (JP 1:10).

This happy relationship between reason and faith is explicated in an extended proportional analogy, in which reason is said to be related to faith as self-love is to love. "Self-love lies at the basis of love, but at its highest point wills precisely its own destruction. This is what love wants too, so these two powers are in agreement with each other in the moment of passion, and this passion is precisely love" (PF 48). The thought which lies behind this is, I think, that there is often a tension between self-love and genuine love, but the tension is not a necessary one. When a person falls in love, the initial ground or basis of the love is self-love; people fall in love because they are seeking their own happiness. The paradox is that when they genuinely do fall in love, self-love is transcended, dethroned, as it were. The person gains happiness in sacrificing happiness for the sake of the loved one. Thus, when genuine love is present, love and self-love are united.

Climacus suggests that there is a significant analogy here to the relation between the understanding and faith. In faith the understanding is dethroned; it must recognize its limits. "To that degree the understanding will have much to object to," just as a selfish person in the grip of self-love may "shrink from love" (PF 47–48). Yet Climacus suggests that there is a sense in which the dethroning of the understanding is at the same time what the understanding itself desires; it is a kind of fulfillment of the understanding, just as love fulfills self-love.

The clear implication of this is that the recognition of the limits of reason can itself be rational, at least under certain conditions, those conditions being the presence of the passion of faith. The formula given for faith by Climacus is this: the understanding yields itself, the paradox grants itself (PF 59). What is important here is that the understanding yields *itself*.

How Is Faith Acquired?

What is this condition? How does one acquire it? We have seen that the acquisition of faith is in some respects like the conceptual transformation one might undergo in becoming a materialist with respect to the mind-body problem, so it might be helpful to ask how a similar transformation might be made with respect to that issue. How might a mind-body dualist be convinced that materialism is true, and that his conceptual difficulties with it are rooted in a problem with his conceptual equipment and beliefs, rather than being rooted in problems with materialism? Obviously, no easy answer to this question is possible. The reasons for the change will be complex, but I think one component will be central in any plausible account. There is no guarantee that anything will work, but if such a change is to be made, the central motivation will come from an encounter with reality. Dualism cannot be falsified by any crucial experiment, but if a transformation is to occur, it will be motivated by new factual discoveries about the brain, which show that one's previous assumptions simply are not adequate to deal with reality, or at least that these assumptions are not pragmatically effective any longer.

Of course there is a strong disanalogy between the mind-body case and the case of Christian faith. The dualist is asked to give up convictions which are very important to him, but he is not asked to give up the assumption that he has at least the ability to revise his conceptual structure to make it adequate. The Christian revelation, on the other hand, says to human understanding that it must recognize, not only that it lacks the truth, but lacks the ability to make progress toward the truth so long as it proceeds on its own steam. Its conceptual equipment with respect to ultimate religious truth is not only flawed, but irremediably broken, so long as it insists on its autonomy and denies its brokenness.

Nevertheless, despite this disanalogy, I believe that the answer to the question as to how one acquires faith—gets into the condition in which reason can understand the reasonableness of recognizing its limits—is very similar to the mind-body case. At least this is what Climacus says. One acquires the passion through an encounter with reality, a first-person meeting with the God himself. The God must grant the condition (PF 55–56). Just as one might conceivably learn that brains think by encountering a brain that thinks, so one might learn that God became a man by encountering the God-man. Climacus says that this is not an act of will on the part of the believer, (62) even though he clearly thinks that an act of will is necessary for it to occur, because it is not an act which the agent can simply carry out on his or her own. The ability to believe requires something which the

believer can only receive from God. Faith represents a discontinuity with the past and with what one has received through one's natural endowments and experiences.

In a similar way, Climacus denies that faith amounts to knowledge (PF 62). I think he means that the conceptual transformation which is required here is too drastic to be assimilated to ordinary transformations in the person's intellectual life. Normally, when I come to know something, what is known is certified by standards of evidence and past beliefs. In the case of faith, however, the transformation is qualitatively different, since what is being transformed is precisely my confidence in those standards of evidence and past beliefs.

One way of illuminating what is going on here is to employ the distinction Alvin Plantinga has made between evidence and grounds. Plantinga has defended the claim that belief in God may be properly basic for some people.[16] This means that these people do not believe in God on the basis of evidence. Rather this belief is itself one of the basic beliefs in their noetic structure. It might seem that such beliefs would be arbitrary, and that there would be no way to determine whether such a belief is justified or not. Plantinga thinks this is not the case. He says that though such a belief is not based on evidence, it may still have a ground.[17] The belief that God cares for me, for example, may be grounded in an experience in which I become aware of God's providential care. Such an experience is not considered by Plantinga to be evidence, for it is not a proposition which has any evidential relationship to the propositional belief it grounds. The experience is not an argument for the belief, and perhaps cannot be transformed into any kind of philosophical argument, and certainly does not need to be thus transformed. Rather, the experience is one which transforms the experiencer. It causes him to be aware of God's loving care for him.

In a similar way Climacus argues that faith in the incarnation may be basic and not the result of historical evidence. Evidence is neither necessary nor sufficient to produce the transformation of the individual.[18] It is the experience of meeting God which produces the passion of faith. It is possible, of course, that the believer may be, perhaps usually is, presented with evidence in the course of this encounter, but what is essential is the encounter itself. Such an encounter may properly be said to be the ground of faith without constituting evidence for faith.

The account Climacus gives here is, I think, faithful to the experience of many believers. While it is not unusual for Christians to be interested in apologetics, such an interest is usually the outcome of faith, not the ground of it. The following account from Anthony Bloom, a Metropolitan of the

Russian Orthodox Church, who was transformed from a militant atheist to a believer, is typical in form if not in the details:

> While I was reading the beginning of St. Mark's Gospel, before I reached the third chapter, I suddenly became aware that on the other side of my desk there was a presence. And the certainty was so strong that it was Christ standing there that it has never left me. This was the real turning point. Because Christ was alive and I had been in his presence I could say with certainty that what the Gospel said about the crucifixion of the prophet of Galilee was true, and the centurion was right when he said, "Truly he is the Son of God." It was in the light of the Resurrection that I could read with certainty the story of the Gospel, knowing that everything was true in it because the impossible event of the Resurrection was to me more certain than any event of history. History I had to believe, the Resurrection I knew for a fact. I did not discover, as you see, the Gospel beginning with its first message of the Annunciation, and it did not unfold for me as a story which one can believe or disbelieve. It began as an event that left all problems of disbelief behind because it was a direct and personal experience.[19]

This account may not seem Kierkegaardian in all respects, particularly in its emphasis on the resurrection, which Climacus certainly does not talk much about. In its essentials, however, it illustrates the points I wish to stress. The primary notion is that faith is the result of a first-person encounter with Christ. In Bloom's account, this encounter comes by means of a historical record (Mark's gospel), rooted in the accounts of contemporaries and passed down from generation to generation, but that record is merely the means. This is precisely the formula Climacus gives for the acquisition of faith: "The person who comes later believes *by means of* (the occasion) the report of the contemporary, by the power of the condition he himself receives from the God" (PF 104).

It is also clear in this account that Bloom's faith is basic for him in the way Plantinga describes, yet it nevertheless clearly has a ground, namely the experience. Bloom clearly does not decide to believe the historical account as a result of evidence for its trustworthiness; rather he comes to evaluate the historical trustworthiness of the account on the basis of his encounter with a living Christ. Notice also the characteristic Kierkegaardian perspective on faith as a certainty concerning something which from one perspective appears absurd, or, in Bloom's words, impossible.

We can now see that the Kierkegaardian leap of faith is hardly a blind leap into the dark, as it is often portrayed. The believer both knows what he is leaping to, and why he is leaping. We can also respond now to the frequently made charge that willing to believe is a kind of immoral

manipulation of belief structure.[20] The person of faith is not someone who tries to make herself believe something she knows is not true, or something she has no reason to think is true. Rather, she is someone who now has good reason to mistrust her earlier ideas about what is true, as a result of an encounter with reality.

Why then is will necessary? Climacus emphasizes the place of will because of a desire to protect human freedom. The encounter with the God in time makes it possible for an individual to recognize the bankruptcy of autonomous reason, but it does not make it necessary.[21] What is necessary is the relinquishment of pride and the acquisition of humility. To avoid the spectre of deterministic predestination, Kierkegaard saw it as necessary to see the individual as retaining some natural, intellectual ability, namely the ability to recognize its inability, just as Socrates' wisdom consisted in his honest recognition of his ignorance. Even this recognition is made possible by the encounter with God, but it is not a recognition which God forces on anyone. Such a transformation from pride to humility is essentially moral and practical, however vast its intellectual consequences, and it is appropriately understood as lying within the province of the will. In seeing the passion of faith as grounded in the leap of the will, Kierkegaard is not endorsing manipulation of beliefs, but recognizing the essential role moral character plays in the quest for truth.

Ultimately, Kierkegaard thinks the reasons why human beings have trouble believing in the incarnation have very little to do with esoteric metaphysical conceptual puzzles. We have trouble believing because we are selfish and have trouble comprehending an action which is pure unselfishness. We have trouble believing because we are proud and do not wish to recognize that there are realities which we are unable to grasp. If this is not completely clear in *Philosophical Fragments*, it becomes so in *Practice in Christianity*. In that book, Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author, gives example after example of offense, and in every case the negative reaction can be traced to moral attitudes on the part of the offended party.[22] In *The Sickness unto Death* the point is made just as clearly: "The real reason people are offended by Christianity is that it is too high, because its goal is not the goal of human persons, because it wants to make a human being into something so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought" (83).

Conclusion: Undermining Neutrality

So is the paradox above reason or against reason? In a sense it is both. It is above reason in that human beings cannot understand how God could

become a human person. It is against reason in that our concrete human thinking, permeated by our sense of what is likely and unlikely, which is in turn shaped by our own selfishness and experience of others' selfishness, judges the possibility as the "strangest of all things." Yet it is not against reason in the sense of being against the laws of logic. Or at least that is what the believer thinks. For one cannot think that what has actually occurred is impossible, and the believer believes in the reality of the God-man.

Of course the unbeliever does not believe it has occurred, and as we have seen is likely to think that the incarnation is a formal contradiction. So perhaps the answer to the question, "Is Kierkegaard an irrationalist?" will depend on who is answering the question. Such a view corresponds with Kierkegaard's own conclusions on the matter. His main concern is certainly not to argue for the reasonableness of Christianity; nor is it to maintain that Christianity is unreasonable. It is to argue the impossibility of neutrality. When reason encounters the paradox, faith and offense are both possible; what is not possible is indifference (CUP 1:51).

It is important, however, not to allow offense to disguise its reaction as purely rational, a straightforward logical deduction. Allowing offense to hide behind logic is like allowing a presidential candidate to wrap himself in patriotism and the flag, and thereby evade having to deal with the real issues. The ground of offense is not pure logic, but pride and self-assertiveness, a confidence in the unlimited powers of human reason. This is, I think, the message of the "Appendix" to chapter 3 of *Philosophical Fragments*, "An Acoustic Illusion," in which it is argued that reason would like to pose as the neutral authority which has exposed the absurdity of the paradox. In fact, the tension between reason and the paradox is a tension which reason has learned about through revelation. Faith and offense are passions, and neither passion—indeed no passion at all—can be derived from the laws of logic.

Perhaps the best way of answering the question as to whether Kierkegaard sees faith as against reason is to say that it depends on what one means by "reason." If one thinks of reason as a timeless, godlike faculty, Kierkegaard's answer is that faith is not against reason in this sense, because reason in this sense does not exist. It is a myth. If one thinks of reason as simply thinking in accordance with the laws of logic, faith is not necessarily against reason either. But if one thinks of reason as the concrete thinking of human beings, shaped as it is by our basic beliefs and attitudes, then there is a tension between reason and faith, one which can be eliminated only at the cost of the identification of Christianity with Christendom.

Kierkegaard in this respect resembles a sociologist of knowledge. The term "reason," like "knowledge" and "logic," often functions as an instrument

of control. Those with social power attempt to legitimate their ways of seeing and acting in the world by identifying their commitments with abstractions like reason and logic. Kierkegaard thinks that because of sin the established attitudes, values, and beliefs which will dominate the designation of what is "rational" will necessarily come into conflict with Christian faith. The possibility of a cultural critique thus stands or falls with the possibility of a critical examination of these established patterns of thinking.

Fortunately, no human being is identical with something called Logic or Reason. We are flesh and blood creatures, finite and temporal, as Climacus in *Postscript* is constantly reminding the speculative philosopher. It is a continual temptation for us, however, to attempt to evade responsibility for our commitments by attributing them to these ghostly substantives. To interpret Kierkegaard's paradox as a logical contradiction is to give in to this temptation and subvert his reminder that human thinking is always carried on by existing individuals.[23]

Chapter 8

Apologetic Arguments in *Philosophical Fragments*

It is not hard to show that Kierkegaard was no friend of apologetic arguments for the truth of the Christian faith.[1] Statements of hostility to apologetic arguments are numerous in Kierkegaard's works. In *Practice in Christianity*, the Christian pseudonym Anti-Climacus says that the attempt to prove that Christ is God is blasphemy from the viewpoint of faith (29). Those who argue for the truth of Christianity from its long endurance in the world are "betraying, denying, abolishing Christianity" (144). In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Johannes Climacus treats attempts to prove the truth of the Scriptures as a symptom of the loss of faith (1:30). In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard pronounces "woe to the person who could make the miracle reasonable" (200).

Nor is this anti-apologetic attitude absent from *Philosophical Fragments*. *Fragments* contains a well-known critique of theistic arguments in chapter 3 (39–44). Later, the pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus discusses the question of whether the god who has become a human being in order to bring humans the truth would offer some kind of "accommodation" for the sake of enabling people to recognize him as the god. He concludes that any such accommodation would be of no value to anyone who lacks the condition of faith and in fact is actually "elicited from him [the god] against his will, and it may just as well push the learner away as draw him closer" (56). So much for historical apologetics.

If we make the reasonable assumption, confirmed by Climacus himself, that the thought-project of the book is intended to illustrate the relation

between Christianity and human reason, then it seems safe to conclude that *Fragments* is hostile to arguments designed to show that Christianity is objectively true. Rather than arguing for the truth of Christian faith, *Fragments* seems far more concerned to highlight the offensive character of Christianity. It is natural for philosophers to try to give explanations of difficult doctrines and arguments for their truth, Climacus says, "for is that not what philosophers are for—to make supernatural things ordinary and trivial?" (PF 53). Climacus, however, insists that the thought-project he spins out as an analogue to Christianity necessarily contains the possibility of offense, a claim echoed by Anti-Climacus for Christianity itself in *Practice in Christianity* (81).

The "Moral" of *Fragments*, though it does not attack apologetics, would seem at least to disavow any apologetic aims in the book. Here Climacus says that his thought-project "indisputably goes beyond the Socratic." However, this "going beyond" has nothing to do with arguing that the invented thought-project is truer than the Socratic perspective: "Whether it [Climacus's project] is therefore more true than the Socratic is a completely different question, one that does not allow itself to be decided in the same breath" (PF 111).

Given the antiapologetic claims that are pervasive in Kierkegaard's authorship and prominent in *Fragments*, it is very surprising to discover that the book contains a number of arguments that look very much like apologetic efforts. I shall briefly look at some apparent apologetic arguments in *Fragments*, arguments that on the surface seem aimed at showing that something like Christianity is true.[2] I shall then try to draw some conclusions about the nature of apologetic arguments in relation to the possibility of offense. Do the arguments given by Climacus undermine his rejection of apologetics? Or do they show that his rejection of apologetics is not a blanket condemnation, but a rejection of a specific kind of apologetics? I shall argue that the latter is the case, and that Climacus allows room for a kind of apologetic argument that still holds open the possibility of offense.

Four Apologetic Arguments in *Philosophical Fragments*

I shall consider four arguments. Three are locatable at specific texts; the fourth is an "argument" that is implicit in the structure of the book as a whole. Each of the first three arguments occurs in a kind of dialogue with the "Interlocutor" who appears to challenge Johannes Climacus from time to time in the book.

The "No Human Author" Argument

At the close of the first chapter, "Thought-Project," the Interlocutor breaks in and accuses Climacus of setting forth as his own invention what is common knowledge, when Climacus presents his account of the God as the indispensable teacher of humans sunk in error. According to the objector, Climacus is like "a vagabond who takes money for showing an area that anyone can see" (PF 21). Climacus responds with ironical penitence: "Maybe so, I hide myself in shame." The penitence hides a point; having admitted that he is not the real author of the project, Climacus goes on to extend to the Interlocutor the honor of the authorship. On the assumption that the Interlocutor will decline the courtesy, Climacus broadens his offer: "Will you then also deny that someone has invented it, that is to say, some human being?" Astonishingly, Climacus assumes that the Interlocutor will not accept any human author, and uses the admission to mitigate the plagiarism charge: "In that case, I am just as close to having invented it as any other person" (21).

Climacus obviously thinks that his thought-project is the work of the God. Furthermore, he claims that the content of the hypothesis somehow enables people to know this: "Everyone who knows it [the thought-project] also knows that he has not invented it" (PF 22). This "oddity" that everyone who knows about the project also knows that it is not of human authorship "enchants" Climacus so much that he concludes that it constitutes a kind of proof of the hypothesis: "It tests the correctness of the hypothesis and proves it" (22).

There are a number of ways of articulating the argument sketched here by Climacus, but on one reading it corresponds pretty closely with one traditional type of apologetic argument for Christianity. Theologians have sometimes argued that the Christian faith is simply not the sort of thing that unaided human reason could ever have invented. The supernatural origin of Christian faith is attested by its content. Thomas Aquinas, for example, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, cites the fact that the Christian revelation includes "truths . . . that surpass every human intellect" as evidence that one can reasonably accept the Christian revelation as coming from God.[3] Put baldly, the form of the argument would be something like this:

1. A religious claim of type X could not have been invented by any human being, but only by God.
2. Christianity makes a claim of type X.

3. This religious claim of Christianity could only have been invented by God.

What is "X" in this argument? It is not altogether clear, but a plausible answer would be the claim made by the thought-project that humans are caught in an error that they cannot overcome themselves, but can only overcome through the teaching of the God.[4] The argument occurs immediately after a passage in which Climacus discusses birth and rebirth. A person who has been born can know that he or she was born; an unborn person can have no such consciousness. Similarly, a person who has been reborn can be conscious of the rebirth, and that the previous state that made the rebirth necessary was a state of "not-being" of a sort (PF 20–21). So perhaps Climacus is suggesting that the Christian claim that humans are caught in original sin," so that they are spiritually dead and completely incapable of overcoming their problem, is not one that could naturally occur to any human being, but can only be known after God has revealed it.

I shall not comment on the strength of this argument or any of the others Climacus recounts, nor shall I discuss the objections to which it may be vulnerable. My purpose in this paper is neither to further nor to debunk apologetics, but to think about the legitimacy of apologetics as a general enterprise within the general framework of Kierkegaardian views of faith and reason.

The Argument from the Uniqueness of the Incarnation

Climacus gives a very similar argument at the close of the second chapter, "The God as Teacher and Savior." The Interlocutor once more accuses Climacus of plagiarism. Climacus once more confesses that he is not the author of the poem, but forces the question as to who the author is, since it would be curious indeed to have a poem without a poet (PF 35). This time Climacus specifically attributes to the Interlocutor the accusation that Climacus has stolen his poem from the God, rather than from any human being or the human race in general (35–36). In reflecting on this point Climacus is once more transported: "But then my soul is also gripped with new wonder—indeed, it is filled with adoration, for it certainly would have been strange if it had been a human poem" (36).

The amazement reflects the theme of chapter 2, which contains an imaginative sketch which fleshes out the bare-bones logical structure of chapter 1. Here the God decides to become the teacher out of self-giving love, and wills to express that love through a decision to take on the lowly

station of the learner who is in error. So we have here an argument structurally similar to the previous argument; the content of the Christian revelation is itself evidence for its supernatural origin, only here the content which serves as the locus of the argument is the story of the incarnation. No human being, says Climacus, could have hit upon such an idea. "Presumably it could occur to a human being to poetize himself in the likeness of the God or the God in the likeness of himself, but not to poetize that the God poetized himself in the likeness of a human being" (PF 36; Hong translation).

I shall again resist the temptation to discuss the plausibility of this claim about the uniqueness and unimaginability of the incarnation. Climacus has no qualms about accepting the claim and drawing some rather extravagant conclusions, however. The person who has had this story confided to him by the God is pictured by him as adoringly echoing 1 Corinthians 2:9 by confessing that "this thought did not arise in my heart." Rather, this thought is "the wonder" or "the miracle" [*Vidunderet*] (PF 36).

The Argument from Offense

The third apologetic argument in *Fragments* that I wish to discuss is contained in the section entitled "Offense at the Paradox (An Acoustic Illusion)," which is the appendix to chapter 3. Climacus has argued that when the learner encounters the incarnation of the God, two passionate responses are possible. The happy encounter between the disciple and the God occurs in the passion of faith; the unhappy relation characterized by misunderstanding is termed offense. The thrust of this section is that the objections to the incarnation made by the offended consciousness are not what they appear to be. Offense literally does not understand itself (PF 50).

Offense rejects the incarnation, described as the "paradox" of the God as a human being, because it sees such a paradox as absurd. Offense thus thinks it has "got the goods" on the paradox, has subjected it to critical scrutiny and found it wanting. The response of the paradox is that offense is merely echoing, in a distorted and therefore confusing form, what the paradox says about itself. The "objection" that offense raises is simply the correct self-understanding of the paradox, echoing back in a misleading form. When offense claims that the paradox is absurd, the paradox makes a vigorous response:

> The understanding has not discovered this; on the contrary, it was the paradox that showed the understanding its place on the wonder stool and replies: Now, what are you wondering about? It is exactly as you say, and the amazing thing is that you think it is an objection, but the truth in the

> mouth of a hypocrite is dearer to me than to hear it from an angel or an apostle. (PF 52)

It is for this reason that Climacus claims that "offense can be regarded as an indirect testing of the correctness of the paradox" (51).[5]

Where is the apologetics here? The argument seems to be something like this. The kind of objections raised against belief in the incarnation are an indirect confirmation of its truth. A genuine revelation from God, a supernatural revelation that is truly "the miracle" (*Vidunderet*), would be something that human reason could not be expected to comprehend. Thus, when human reason pronounces that it cannot make sense of the incarnation, this is precisely what one would expect if the incarnation were a divine revelation. The descriptions of the paradox given by the offended person are then helpful in two ways. First, they echo and thus confirm the assertion of the incarnation to be a divine revelation and not a human invention. Secondly, they represent the kind of response one would expect from an encounter with a genuine revelation, and thus they provide at least weak confirmation that this revelation is genuine.

In effect Climacus argues that the very improbability of the incarnation to human understanding is a mark of its truth. A person who wanted to make up a story would make up something much more plausible. The paradox, however, says that "comedies and novels and lies must be probable, but how could I be probable" (PF 52). An argument that is roughly similar to this one is again present in Aquinas, who argues that the content of the Christian revelation is so contrary to a human being's natural disposition to believe that the fact that people can be brought to assent to it is itself the "greatest of miracles." Aquinas here contrasts Christianity with Islam, which he argues contains the kinds of claims likely to be accepted by carnal men and is supported by the kind of proofs "as could be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom."[6]

The Argument of the Book as a Whole

This last argument from the appendix to chapter 3 casts an illuminating ray on the structure of *Philosophical Fragments* as a whole. Although the book seems to eschew any apologetic argument in the "Moral," more than one reader has seen the book as a whole as a sustained argument for the plausibility of an orthodox Christian view of the incarnation,[7] and this despite the claim of the author that the attempt to make the paradox probable is wrongheaded (PF 94–95). The fact that this kind of reading is even possible sug-

gests that the pose of neutrality with respect to Christianity on the part of Climacus may be ironically deceptive.

A review of the book as a whole might be helpful in suggesting how it may appear to have an apologetic thrust. Chapter 1 describes the thought-project that is clearly supposed to be an analogue to Christianity as a logically consistent, coherent alternative to the Socratic perspective on "the Truth" and how the Truth is to be gained. Not only is this Christian analogue internally consistent; some of what may appear to be its most objectionable features, such as its postulation of a condition of error that humans cannot overcome themselves, are presented as logically essential if Christianity (to avoid the clumsy locution "Christian analogue") is to be something genuinely different from pagan, Greek thought. Certainly the claim that Christianity is not the same thing as Greek thought is not implausible, so the argument of chapter 1 can be read as deducing from this plausible claim some of the main features of Christian faith.

Chapter 2 goes even further and actually attempts in some sense to make the incarnation plausible. Chapter 1 argues that any genuine alternative to Socrates will have God as our teacher. Chapter 2 argues, at least poetically and persuasively, that we can only make sense of this supposition by postulating an incarnation of God in human form. Only self-giving love could motivate the God to become our teacher, and self-giving love would desire a union with the beloved that could only be achieved by the lover taking on the condition of the beloved.

Chapter 3 rejects natural theology, as we noted at the beginning of the paper, but it does much more than this. It confirms the inability of reason to come up with any true knowledge of God on its own, and thus once more points to the reasonableness of looking to revelation as the only path to knowing God. Though chapter 3 insists that the incarnation is a paradox, and that reason may well be offended by it, it insists just as strongly that offense is not the only possible reaction. Reason and the paradox may also be on good terms, a condition that is made possible when reason "wills its own downfall" (PF 47). Climacus also tells us that reason and the paradox can be happily joined when the understanding "surrenders itself" (54), or steps aside (59). It seems significant that it is reason itself that does the surrendering and stepping aside. The implication of this is that though the paradox cannot be understood by reason, reason can understand this fact. Climacus seems to be arguing that it can be reasonable for reason to recognize the limits of reason.

The appendix to chapter 3, as we have seen, defuses the objections made by the offended consciousness by arguing that these claims are unoriginal

echoes of what God's revelation itself contains. Moreover, the objections represent precisely the kind of reaction one would expect from humans who are naturally prone to believing they are self-sufficient, humans who are insulted by a revelation that implies the opposite.

Chapters 4 and 5, as we have seen, imply that historical apologetics is pointless. Faith in the God is produced by a firsthand encounter with the incarnate God, and historical evidence is neither necessary for such faith nor sufficient for it. However, even here the thrust is not solely anti-apologetic. Many critics of Christian faith would argue that its historical claims cannot be reasonably believed because the historical evidence is insufficient. The point of Climacus's argument is that such an objection to Christian faith is misguided, because the ground of faith is not evidence of this type at all. The lack of such evidence is not the basis of offense, and the lack should not be seen as a problem for Christianity. Hence the overall message of the last two chapters seems designed to undermine one common objection to Christianity. They at least seem to contain a negative apologetic argument, an attempt to undermine an objection to faith.

Thus, *Philosophical Fragments* as a whole, read from beginning to end, seems as if it could be designed to make Christian faith more plausible, despite the repeated claims to the contrary. The ease with which the book can be read as an apologetic argument suggests that this reading may not simply be an example of "deconstructing the text" by making its author say the opposite of what is intended. It suggests that apologetics of a sort may be what the author intended.

Apologetics in a Nonfoundationalist Key

Even if I am wrong in suggesting the plausibility of such a reading of the book as a whole, there still remain the specific apologetic arguments we discover sprinkled throughout the book. How can the polemic against apologetics in *Philosophical Fragments* be reconciled with the apologetics the book itself contains?

Of course one could just say that the two cannot be reconciled. Johannes Climacus is a self-described humorist and perhaps would not be troubled by the constraints of logical consistency. He condemns apologetics but engages in it himself. I cannot speak for others, but I myself would not find this kind of inconsistency to be particularly humorous. Humor as incongruity should no more be confused with logical inconsistency than profundity should be confused with obscurity.

I find much more interesting the suggestion that there may be different kinds of apologetics. Perhaps the kind of apologetics that Climacus and Kierkegaard would censure is significantly different from the kind they engage in, so different that it did not occur to either that the kind of apologetic argument they presented *was* a form of apologetics.

To flesh this suggestion out, we need an illuminating characterization of what the two kinds of apologetic argument are like. I think there are two reliable clues we need to keep clearly in mind in order to do this. One is the ineliminability of faith. Climacus wants to say that the possession of faith is an essential prerequisite for grasping the truth of Christianity. Hence we can safely conclude that any form of apologetic argument that appears to make faith unnecessary or even to lessen the need for faith would be the kind of apologetics that Climacus wishes to reject.

The second clue is closely tied to the first, and concerns the possibility of offense. Climacus holds that the possibility of offense is inherent in authentic Christianity. In fact, he even holds, as we have seen, that the reactions of the offended consciousness to the claims of Christianity are a kind of confirmation of its truth. So it is safe to say that Climacus will condemn any apologetic argument that seems designed to eliminate or even to lessen the possibility of offense.

So now our questions are as follows: Can we imagine a type of apologetic argument that seems designed to make faith unnecessary and offense impossible? Also, can we imagine another type of apologetic argument, one that *requires* faith and does *not* diminish the possibility of offense? I think we can understand what arguments of both of these types would look like.

Roughly, I think that arguments that are designed to eliminate the necessity for faith and lessen the possibility of offense are arguments that are presented within the framework of the epistemology of classical foundationalism. To give content to this suggestion, and ultimately to characterize in a concrete way the type of apologetic argument I have in mind, I must say in a brief manner what I mean by "classical foundationalism."

First, classical foundationalism, in the sense I have in mind, is of course a form of foundationalism. That is, the classical foundationalist pictures knowledge as something like a building, and affirms that a building needs foundations. Translating the metaphor, the foundationalist recognizes that although we hold some beliefs on the basis of others, the process of justifying our beliefs by giving reasons for them cannot go on forever. Somewhere the chain of justification must end, and it ends in those beliefs (or items of knowledge) that are foundational to all of the rest.

How does the *classical* foundationalist differ from others? Alvin Plantinga has characterized classical foundationalism as a doctrine that puts restrictions on what may properly be foundational to what may be termed a person's noetic structure. Specifically, the classical foundationalist says that the foundations of knowledge must be highly secure; good buildings require good foundations. Hence, Plantinga describes two forms of classical foundationalism, each based on a conception of what beliefs are properly basic: ancient and medieval classical foundationalists accept as properly basic only propositions that are "either self-evident or evident to the senses," while modern foundationalists accept as properly basic only propositions that are "either self-evident or incorrigible."[8]

If one asks what motivates foundationalism in both of these forms, I think that the most plausible answer is a desire to avoid error. The classical foundationalist wants certainty in some sense of that word. If I base my beliefs on what is less than certain, then there is a real chance I may be mistaken. To avoid this, I must root my beliefs in certainties, the kind of thing any sane, rational person who is in the appropriate position can understand and recognize as true.

Foundationalist Apologetic Arguments

If we translate classical foundationalist epistemology into apologetic arguments, then it is easy to see that these arguments appear to violate the two constraints on permissible apologetics that we drew from Climacus. Such arguments appear to lessen the need for faith, and they appear to make offense less possible. Aquinas, for example, seems to say that faith and knowledge are mutually exclusive in the sense that what we know by "vision" or "sight," or what we know by philosophical demonstration we can no longer be said to believe on the basis of authority.[9]

Two kinds of arguments will serve as illustrations of the kind of apologetics that I believe Climacus would find repugnant. One would be attempts to prove the existence of God, where this project is construed as an attempt to show that the existence of God can be logically deduced from premises that can be known with certainty by any sane, rational person. The "Five Ways" of Thomas Aquinas can be construed in this way. (I shall not attempt to say whether this is how Aquinas himself construed them.) The first of the arguments Aquinas presents begins with a premise that is alleged to be "certain and evident to our senses," and each of the others begins with a claim that is thought to have a similar degree of certainty.[10] The soundness of the

arguments seems to imply that although it is possible and even permissible for a person to believe in God by faith, faith with respect to belief that God exists is not necessary for the person who has grasped the soundness of the proofs. So the arguments can be construed as making faith unnecessary, at least for some people. Furthermore, the arguments would also seem to eliminate the possibility of offense. It is hard to see how any reasonable individual could find rationally offensive what is rationally demonstrable and certain.

It seems pretty clear from chapter 3 of *Philosophical Fragments* that Climacus does find attempts to prove God's existence in this manner wanting (39–44). Yet despite the historical importance of these arguments in philosophy, I believe they are not the best illustration of the kind of apologetics that Climacus finds objectionable, because they do not involve in an essential way the concept of offense. For Climacus, and for Kierkegaard generally, offense is not an attitude inspired merely by belief in God, but one that has as its focus the specific belief that God has become a human being, which Climacus generally calls the "paradox."

There is a long tradition of historical apologetics within Christian thought, attempts to defend the historicity of the incarnation of God as Jesus. Someone who held a classical foundationalist epistemology and who held that historical knowledge was objective in character would very likely hold that these apologetic arguments shared that objective character. Someone who held a positivist or quasi-positivist view of historical knowledge, for example, might even construe such arguments as "scientific" in character.[11] If one simply looks at the historical evidence for the miracles performed by Jesus, the claims about himself that those miracles attest, and especially the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, then the divinity of Jesus can be seen as the most reasonable conclusion one could draw from the facts, even if it is conceded that in historical matters strict proof is impossible.

There seems little question that Climacus finds such arguments mistaken and wrongheaded. He says unequivocally in chapters 4 and 5 of *Fragments* that without the condition of faith any historical evidence of this type is of no value (PF 62, 64, 69). To buttress his case he gives thought experiments. For example, a contemporary of the God's appearance who hired one hundred secret agents to observe the God's every movement accurately could wash his hands of the charge of historical ignorance, but would by no means necessarily be a disciple of the God (59–60). A tyrant from the next generation who seizes and interrogates all the surviving witnesses is similarly protected against historical inaccuracy but is by no means closer to faith (92). Climacus finds

historical arguments from the consequences of Christian faith, such as its long endurance in the world and supposed beneficent transforming power, to be even more dubious and less convincing (94–98).[12]

Insofar as such historical arguments purport to establish their conclusions on the basis of objective evidence, they certainly appear to make faith unnecessary. They make it appear that a person's ability to believe that Jesus Christ is divine depends solely on that person's intellectual acuity; moral and spiritual qualities seem to drop out of the picture as irrelevant, except to the degree that a lack of such qualities might interfere with a person's intellectual equipment operating in a proper manner. Furthermore, it is hard to see how they preserve the essential character of the possibility of offense, since they seem designed to show that a belief in the divinity of Jesus is the most logical conclusion a rational person who is aware of the evidence could draw. It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that it is this type of argument that Climacus has in mind when he condemns apologetics.

Apologetics in a New Key: Nonfoundationalist Arguments

If one grants that an accurate characterization has been given of the type of apologetic argument Climacus wishes to reject, then the question remains as to what kind there might be that he could accept. I think Johannes Climacus gives us a helpful clue here in his discussion of the physico-teleological argument, or argument from design, for God's existence. While Climacus is very critical of those who put forward this argument as deciding the question of God's existence, he makes an apparently favorable comment about Socrates, who is credited with having invented the argument. Socrates did not assume that the question of God's existence is one that must be left undecided prior to the argument, but "continually presupposes that the God exists, and on this presupposition he seeks to infuse nature with the idea of purposiveness" (PF 44).

One might well wonder about the value of an "argument" that appears to rest on the assumption that its conclusion is true, but let us put aside that worry to deal with later. The immediate point I wish to make is that Climacus does not seem to object to an argument that in some sense rests on faith rather than being a replacement for faith. The argument that Socrates is credited with advancing is clearly not one that would convince any sane, rational person of its conclusion, nor does it appear intended to accomplish this. Rather the argument itself seems to rest on a risky assumption, a presupposition of Socrates that is not self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible.

Now if we construe Socrates's argument as blatantly circular, it seems a pointless enterprise. On the assumption that God exists, it is possible to infer that God exists. But I think such a construal would miss the point of what Socrates is credited with in this case. Climacus says that Socrates begins with the presupposition that God exists, and that nature is God's handiwork. On this assumption, he "reads" or interprets the natural world as showing signs of fitness and purposiveness. Perhaps the suggestion here is that these signs might not have been noticed if Socrates had not come to the natural world with this prior assumption. Clearly, the "data" or "evidence" Socrates discovers would not look very impressive to a classical foundationalist, since it is not the product of a purely objective, presuppositionless observer.

Before agreeing that Socrates's argument is therefore worthless, it would be well to remind ourselves that classical foundationalism has taken some hard knocks in recent philosophy. It might in fact be difficult to find someone today who would accept the possibility of a purely objective, presuppositionless observer. It is a commonplace of contemporary theories of perception that what a person is able to perceive does depend partly on the expectations, basic beliefs, and conceptual apparatus of the observer. Socrates certainly is not neutral in viewing the world as he does, but that does not imply that the picture of the world he develops is one he has simply invented or projected onto his experience. The subjective states of Socrates do not have to be seen as a "distorting veil," as is assumed so often by classical foundationalism. Rather, the "subjectivity" that Socrates brings to his experience of the world might be an enabling factor, providing Socrates with the skills and abilities needed to recognize features of the world that would otherwise be unnoticed.

This argument of Socrates is a nonfoundationalist one in at least two respects. First, the truth of at least one of the premises, in this case that nature is purposive, can be recognized only by certain people, people who approach their experience with the right sort of subjectivity. Secondly, even for those people, this premise is not self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible, nor does it appear to be deducible from premises that meet this standard. Not everything about our experience of nature supports this perspective, and it is possible for one to understand how others might reject the claim, and even to imagine oneself coming to reject it.

Nevertheless, I would assent that the argument is not necessarily pointless or viciously circular. One might wonder about this, given the way Climacus construes the argument. As he describes Socrates's procedure, Socrates begins with the assumption that God exists, and with this assumption experiences

the natural order as showing evidence of divine handiwork. Is this not circular reasoning?

It is easy to state the argument in such a way that it is not formally circular. For example, one could reason that (1) nature shows purposive design; (2) purposive design is the work of a creative intelligence; hence (3) nature is the work of a creative intelligence. The argument is clearly not formally circular. However, Climacus seems to suggest that the acceptance of the first premise is tantamount to accepting the conclusion. This might suggest that the argument is pointless if not circular, because it will only be accepted as sound by someone who already accepts the conclusion.

It does not follow that the argument is pointless even if it is true that the first premise will only be accepted by a person who already accepts the conclusion. The argument might still have value in helping such a person better understand his or her belief; the value of the argument might lie in articulating what was only implicit in the conviction, and in helping the individual to see the links between belief in God and certain experiences of the natural order. Nor is it true that the argument will have no evidential force in this case. The links between experience and the belief that the argument helps make clear may support the belief. Even if it is true that those links will only be noticed by someone who already holds the belief, that does not mean the links are not real. Nor does it mean that they have no value in strengthening the belief, helping the believer "see" the ways in which nature points to the truth of the belief. The fact that those links may not be noticed by others in no way shows that they have no epistemic force.

Furthermore, it is not clear that such experiential links will necessarily only be noticed by someone who already holds the belief. Even if a belief in the purposiveness of nature is tantamount to seeing nature as the handiwork of God, and hence implicitly contains belief in God as an element, it is possible that someone may have failed to notice the connection. Belief in God may be *implicit* in belief in the purposiveness of nature, but what is implicit in a belief may not always be obvious, and the value of the argument might lie precisely in making what is implicit explicit. Someone may still object that the argument will not be convincing to everyone, but only to those with the right faith. However, in this context that is not a demerit, since we set out precisely to see if an apologetic argument that is nonfoundationalist could be envisaged, and therefore the argument should not be evaluated by the criteria employed by classical foundationalism.

So I would claim that the physico-teleological argument that Climacus attributes to Socrates provides a model of an apologetic argument that has genuine epistemic worth and yet would be acceptable to Climacus. The

argument is acceptable because it does not attempt to eliminate or replace faith, but explicitly posits faith as a necessary condition for the acceptance of the argument. But what of the possibility of offense?

To deal with offense, we must shift our attention from discussion of natural theology, where offense really has no place,[13] to discussion of the incarnation. I believe that the Socratic theistic argument we have examined does provide a model for understanding the apologetic arguments offered by Climacus himself. The central argument we saw at the conclusion of the first two chapters of *Fragments* revolved around the claim that the content of the thought-project Climacus ironically claims to have invented is such that no human being could have invented it. I think it is safe to say that this claim is not one that is self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible. Nor do I think it is likely that anyone will produce an argument for this claim from premises that are acceptable to classical foundationalists. Hence I think that it is very likely that this argument is, like Socrates's reputed bit of natural theology, one that will only be acceptable to someone who already has a certain degree of faith that the story is indeed one revealed by God.

Just as was the case for the Socratic argument, this does not imply that the argument is circular or pointless. Certainly, it is not difficult to formulate the argument in a way that is not formally circular. And even if it is true that only the person who already has faith that God has become a human being will be able to recognize the remarkable features of the story that point to a nonhuman author, it does not follow that the argument is pointless. The features of the story that the argument (or a suitably developed version) might highlight and enable the person of faith to recognize may be genuine features of the story, and they may indeed truly point to a divine author. What is implicit in accepting the story may not always be explicit to the individual who accepts the story, and thus the argument may have genuine value in strengthening and confirming an acceptance of the story.

But what of offense? Is such an argument an attempt to do away with the possibility of offense? Of course the person who believes the story is one that God authored is not offended, but that is not surprising. Climacus does not say that the person of faith is offended. What is necessary is not offense but the possibility of offense. It seems to me that an argument of this sort, which is only likely to be acceptable to a person of faith, in no way diminishes the possibility of offense. In fact, such a possibility may be strengthened by the argument, insofar as the argument highlights a feature of the Christian story that is more than a little difficult to swallow. Someone who finds it preposterous that a human being could be divine is not necessarily going to find it less preposterous to be told that this is a truth which God has

revealed to us humans, and that it is a story that no human being could have invented.

The argument of Climacus that offense itself provides a confirmation of the truth of the incarnation demands a similar analysis. I cannot conceive of any reading of this argument that would sound convincing in a classical foundationalist context. On the other hand, for a person of faith, it may indeed be revealing and significant to notice that the objections of the offended consciousness are precisely what one would expect if a divine revelation were genuine, and that these objections are a kind of confused echoing of part of the content of that divine revelation.

Do such apologetic arguments commit the sin of the other kind of apologetic argument? Specifically, do they make the grasping of religious truth a purely cognitive matter that seems divorced from the possession of moral and spiritual qualities on the part of the believer? I think it is easy to construe the arguments in such a way that they do not do this. All one must do is further specify the nature of the faith that is regarded as a condition for accepting the arguments. If faith is a complex condition that includes basic moral and spiritual dispositions, then of course it follows that one cannot grasp the force of the arguments apart from the possession of those qualities.[14] Describing faith in such a way is of course independently motivated and not an ad hoc move; the theologian has plenty of reasons to regard faith as more than simply accepting certain propositions without conclusive evidence. Rather, faith must be seen as consisting partly in such things as a receptive openness to the mysterious aspects of human experience, an unselfish willingness to consider whether one's own attempts to dominate the world are an expression of sinful pride, and an attitude of hope towards the possibility of a life of eternal love for oneself and for other human beings. It may well be that people with such qualities are the kinds of people who get transformed by God in the course of their experiences and form the kinds of beliefs about themselves and the universe that are tantamount to belief in God.

I conclude that Climacus is not inconsistent in putting forward apologetic arguments while condemning classical foundationalist apologetics, so long as the apologetic arguments put forward are nonfoundationalist in character. Once this is recognized, the possibility opens of recasting other traditional apologetic arguments in a nonfoundationalist mode, such as historical arguments that appeal to miracles or which suggest that the transformed lives of the apostles can be seen as evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. I do not think, however, that this is a possibility that Climacus or Kierkegaard foresaw, and perhaps it is not one they would have welcomed. However, I do not see that they have any real grounds for rejecting such a

recasting of traditional apologetics, provided the arguments are carefully constructed in such a way that they can be seen to presuppose and not replace faith. Given the fact that many people today find it difficult to accept miracles, so that the presence of miracles in a narrative is itself grounds for questioning the veracity of the narrative, it is not hard to see how this requirement could be fulfilled. I would insist once more that even if such arguments only have value to people of faith—and this assumption could certainly be challenged—it still may be true that their value to people of faith is great.[15] Evidence that is only recognizable to people of faith may still be evidence. I conclude that someone who accepts the basic complaint of Climacus and Kierkegaard against apologetic arguments need not reject all apologetics. Rather, apologetic arguments of a nonfoundationalist type are perfectly consistent with a Kierkegaardian perspective on faith and reason.

Chapter 9

The Relevance of Historical Evidence for Christian Faith: A Critique of a Kierkegaardian View

If we assume that Christian faith involves a propositional component whose content is historical, then the question arises as to whether Christian faith must be based on historical evidence, at least in part. One of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, Johannes Climacus, argues in *Philosophical Fragments* that though faith does indeed have such a historical component, it does not depend on evidence but rather on a firsthand experience of Jesus for which historical records serve only as an occasion. I argue that Climacus's account is coherent, and that on such a view historical evidence is not sufficient for faith for anyone. However, in contrast to Climacus, I argue that evidence might still be valuable and even necessary for some people. The resulting danger that the decision about faith might become a question for scholarship is best met, not by insulating faith from historical scholarship, but by recognizing the ability of faith to supply a context in which the evidence available is sufficient.

While hardly anyone would wish to identify Christian faith with propositional belief, traditional Christians hold that Christian faith does involve, include, or presuppose certain propositional beliefs. Some of these beliefs are historical in character. For example, traditional Christians believe that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, buried, and rose again from the dead, and they also hold that these beliefs are central components of their faith.

I have already said that faith cannot simply be identified with these beliefs, or with any set of propositional beliefs. Faith is a trusting commitment which transforms a person and leads to eternal life. For the Christian

this faith consists in or is made possible by a relationship to a historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, but one could hardly be consciously related to a person about whom one had no beliefs at all. So the traditional view that faith involves historical belief is plausible.

That view, however, raises a number of weighty problems concerning the relationship of faith to history. One of the most important of these concerns the relation of faith to historical evidence. If faith includes historical beliefs, then it seems plausible that faith would not be reasonable unless it were reasonable to hold the historical beliefs in question. Ordinarily, historical beliefs are held on the basis of historical evidence of various types. Is it the case, then, that people should only seek to develop and maintain Christian faith if there is sufficient historical evidence to make the historical beliefs that are a component of that faith reasonable?

Faith and History in *Philosophical Fragments*

This question is explored at some length by Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous character Søren Kierkegaard created to be the author of *Philosophical Fragments*. In this work Climacus presents what he terms a thought-experiment. He first describes what he terms the "Socratic" view of "the Truth," a term which is here close to the religious concept of salvation. On the Socratic view, each person has the *Truth* within already, and a relationship to the divine can thereby be presupposed in every person. He then asks whether any alternative to such a view can be imagined, and proceeds to "invent," with clear ironical and humorous touches, a view that suspiciously resembles Christianity, according to which the Truth must be brought to the individual by a God who becomes a human being in order to make it possible for the individual to receive the Truth. A relationship to the divine is thus made possible by the God's historical appearance.

I shall assume that Climacus's thought experiment is presented in order to illuminate the nature of Christian faith, as Climacus himself clearly says at the conclusion of the book, and that the significant features of this experiment are to be taken as features of Christian faith as well. When this assumption is made, Climacus's thoughts on the relationship between faith and historical evidence are quite unusual when compared with most Christian thinkers, and their oddity stems from what appears to be an internal tension.

On the one hand, Climacus wants to maintain there is an essential difference between Christianity and Greek modes of thought, a difference which depends on the historical component of Christianity. Climacus could say with respect to Christianity what Johannes de Silentio says about faith in

Fear and Trembling: Either Christianity is something essentially different from what Socrates could have come up with, or else Christianity does not exist, "precisely because it has always existed" (55). In such a case, Christianity as a unique phenomenon would not exist because it would simply be a specific version of a generic human religiosity. Climacus locates the essential distinguishing feature of Christianity in the historical entrance of God into history. A real alternative to Socratic "immanence" (a Kierkegaardian term for any view that regards the Truth as something human beings possess or can attain using only their own unaided natural powers) requires that we deny that the Truth is in us, even in the form of a potentiality for recognizing the Truth (PF 13–14). The Truth as well as the capacity to recognize the Truth must be brought to us by a God who enters history. So any attempt to replace the Jesus of history with a mythical figure whose real significance lies in the existential meaning of the narrative, or in the content of the teaching must be rejected (109). The objectivity of the historical is required in order to get "the God outside yourself."[1]

This emphasis on history is, however, coupled with a depreciation of historical knowledge as either necessary or sufficient for becoming a disciple. Climacus seems to make historical knowledge virtually irrelevant to faith:

> Even if the contemporary generation had left nothing behind except these words, "we have believed that in such and such a year the God showed himself in a servant's humble form, lived and taught among us, and then died"—this is more than enough. The contemporary generation would have done what is necessary, for this little announcement, this world-historical *nota bene*, is sufficient to become an occasion for someone who comes later, and the most complicated report can never in all eternity become more for the person who comes later. (PF 104)

The unusual nature of Climacus's ideas is now clear. More commonly, those who have held that the incarnation was a genuinely historical event in something like the traditional sense, however varied that sense may be, have also held that it was important to have good historical evidence for that event. Those who believe we do not have such evidence, but still wish to affirm a faith in Christ as the divine lord, have tended to reinterpret the incarnation as a symbol whose power does not rest on its objective historicity.

The question I wish to pose is whether the conjunction of the claim that the historical is essential with the claim that historical evidence is unimportant makes sense. If not, the question of which to modify would still be open. Both traditional Christians as well as those more liberal Christians still engaged in the quest for the historical Jesus would argue that what must go

is the cavalier dismissal of historical evidence. These groups have been suspicious of Kierkegaard for what they perceive as his irrationalism. Many contemporary theologians, on the other hand, convinced that making faith dependent on historical evidence is a recipe for disaster, would argue that what must go is the assumption that faith must be grounded in factual historical events.

Reasons for Making Faith Independent of Historical Evidence

I believe that Climacus has strong reasons for wishing to avoid both of these recommendations. Whether those reasons are ultimately decisive, and indeed whether there is really a coherent alternative to the revisions his critics would urge upon him remains to be determined. There are several reasons why he wishes to avoid making faith dependent on historical evidence. I shall discuss two of those reasons briefly at this point, postponing a look at the third and final reason until later.

The first reason is that if faith were dependent on historical evidence, it would violate a commitment to a kind of egalitarian principle of justice to which Climacus is committed. Climacus believes that the attainment of the Truth must somehow be equally available to people of every generation. "Would the God allow the power of time to decide to whom he would be gracious, or would it not be worthy of the God to make the reconciliation equally difficult for every human at every time and in every place?" (PF 106). If faith were dependent on historical evidence, then it would be very difficult to satisfy this principle, since it would appear that eyewitnesses or those with greater access to the historical records would have an advantage.

Actually, it is not easy to see how this egalitarianism could be satisfied by a faith with historical, propositional content, even if that faith is not based on historical evidence, since it would be difficult for those people who have not even heard of the events to have any beliefs about them, even if they do not need historical evidence to believe them. Perhaps Climacus can find a way to surmount this problem, however. He might assume that God somehow supplies people with the content of what they must believe, either in this life or after death.[2] Alternatively, the principle of equality might be restricted to those who have had a fair chance to hear of the historical events in question. Perhaps it is only their salvation that depends on attaining the right kind of historical faith, and those in a different situation are not measured by the same standard. If so, then one can see how the claim that faith does not rest on historical evidence introduces a greater measure of equality

within the group of people who have heard the news. In any case, Climacus has other reasons for not allowing faith to depend on historical evidence.

A second reason is what might be called the incommensurability between authentic religious commitment and matters of intellectual evidence. This theme, which is more developed in *Postscript* than in *Fragments*, focuses on the character of Christian faith, which has about it an absoluteness and finality.[3] A person of faith is someone who is willing to risk her life and stake everything on what she believes. The evidence for a historical event can never be more than probable and tentative, subject to revision in light of new findings. Climacus thinks that if faith were based on evidence, it would necessarily share in this tentativeness. He wants to see faith as a life-transforming passion but does not see how such a passion could be engendered by calculation of evidential probabilities. Hence he does not wish to see faith as something that depends on evidence whose quality necessarily fluctuates as new discoveries are made and further inquiry is carried out.

Why Historicity Matters

On the other hand, Climacus wishes to resist giving up the objective historicity of the incarnation because it is the actual historicity of the incarnation that makes possible a revelation that can confront and correct my deep-rooted assumptions about God and myself. If I am indeed sinful, and if those deeply rooted assumptions are wrong, then the possibility of such a revelation is not to be dismissed in a cavalier way. The incarnation makes Christianity what is termed in *Postscript* a religion of "transcendence." Transcendence is important here not only for its possible value as a corrective and challenge to my individual errors and pride; it also represents the foundation of any genuinely human social order.

The established social order constantly attempts to deify itself; that is the secret of Christendom, which is merely the attempt to employ Christianity to do what human societies always do. To foil this human attempt at self-deification, epitomized in the Hegelian political philosophy, we need a God who is truly transcendent, so that the established order can be seen in its relativity, and the possibility of critical dissent be kept open. Despite Kierkegaard's own political conservatism, there is a radical element to his social and political thought, an element that is tied to transcendence. Without a transcendent God in time, who speaks to us from "outside" our innate religious consciousness, we humans will manufacture God in our own image, and we will do so to buttress the status quo. Any attempt to substitute for the historical incarnation a "myth" or "story" or "symbol" whose factual

truth is unimportant inevitably transforms Christianity into a "Socratic" view that assumes that our religious consciousness does possess the Truth.

Despite these reasons for holding simultaneously to the historicity of the incarnation and the irrelevance of historical evidence, Climacus's view is problematic. Is it possible to believe that Jesus Christ lived and died for me as the Son of God, and be indifferent to critical questions about the factuality of my beliefs? Suppose, to push things to the extreme, that it could be shown that there was no firsthand evidence at all, and that overwhelmingly powerful evidence appeared that the New Testament was concocted in the fourth century. In such a situation would a person not naturally doubt whether Jesus had lived at all, and accordingly doubt whether or not he was indeed divine?

One could at this point retreat to the view that the object of faith is simply that the God has appeared somewhere, sometime. The content of faith, however, would in that case seem distressingly vague, a blank canvas that would have little power to jolt and overturn our current Socratic ideas. Does such a vague historical claim really differ much from a Socratic myth? M. J. Ferreira puts the point by noting that genuine historical events have identity conditions if we are meaningfully to refer to them.[4] If we want to say that something historically occurred and is the foundation of our faith, but that how it occurred can be left to the historians as unimportant, the question arises as to whether what occurred can be completely divorced from how it occurred. Ferreira claims that we need at least some information about an event in order to identify the event.

To illustrate Ferreira's argument, consider the example of Moses. Moses is the individual who confronted Pharaoh, led Israel out of Egypt, inscribed the Ten Commandments, and so on. Some or much of this information may be inaccurate, but if we had no reliable information about Moses whatsoever, then, at least according to some views of reference, it is hard to see how we could have any true beliefs about Moses, because we could not use the symbol "Moses" to pick out a historical figure successfully. In the same way, it would appear that to speak meaningfully about Jesus as the historical incarnation of God, we need some accurate historical information about Jesus. And if it is important for our information to be historically accurate, how can we avoid a concern for the quality of the historical evidence?

This argument of Ferreira's is not decisive, I think, because there are other plausible accounts of historical reference than the one she seems to be relying on. According to one prominent theory, historical reference is fixed by a causal chain. Someone actually existed and is dubbed or "baptized" as "Moses." Later people successfully refer to Moses if the actual Moses is the

originator of the causal process that leads them to speak about "Moses." On this view people could be fundamentally wrong in their beliefs about Moses and might conceivably discover this through historical investigation. It is the actual Moses, however, that they hold the mistaken beliefs about, and thus they still refer to him when they use the term "Moses." Something like this could be true of the historical Jesus as well.

If a causal theory of meaning is viable, then it does not seem that one needs much if any correct historical information about a figure in order to refer to that figure. Yet in dealing with significant religious figures such as Moses and Jesus, I would argue that some historical claims do at least some work in fixing the meaning of the reference, at least for most speakers. If it turns out that when I use the word Jesus to refer successfully to a particular figure, but then discover that none of the claims made about that figure in the New Testament were historically true, I think most people—believers and unbelievers—would conclude that the "Jesus" of whom I meant to be speaking, never really existed. For significant religious figures, a causal theory of meaning thus cannot be the whole story.

Faith as Epistemologically Basic

Climacus's answer to this problem lies in a view of faith which sees faith as epistemologically basic, in something like Alvin Plantinga's sense of the term.[5] A basic belief is one that is not held on the basis of any other beliefs or any evidence that is propositional in character. Basic beliefs are therefore not held on the basis of any inference or argument, though they may have what Plantinga calls a ground in the circumstances or experiences that evoke them. Plantinga holds that some beliefs are *properly* basic; that is, in certain circumstances certain persons may hold these beliefs without violating any intellectual duty or evidencing any epistemic fault or defect. Though this is controversial, I believe that Climacus thinks that Christian faith is not only basic, but properly basic for the believer.

Climacus says that faith is a passion that is the result of a firsthand encounter between the individual and the incarnate God.[6] Historical records function as the occasion for this encounter (perhaps securing the identity of the historical referent), but what matters is the encounter itself, in which God grants the individual "the condition" of faith. "*By means of* the contemporary's report (the occasion), the person who comes later believes by the power of the condition he himself receives from the God" (PF 104). Thus, the encounter is itself the ground of faith, which is therefore not based on evidence in the sense that it is not based on arguments or inferences from

any propositions whose probability must be evaluated. No amount of historical evidence is sufficient to guarantee that this encounter will occur or that faith will be its outcome, and no specific amount of historical evidence is necessary in order for the encounter to occur or faith to ensue. Climacus insists that the encounter is one that can as easily lead to offense as to faith.

He supports his claims here with two thought experiments. One can easily imagine a person who has all the evidence one could want of a historical sort, but who has not thereby been transformed through a meeting with God incarnate (PF 59–60). One can also imagine someone with very slender historical knowledge whose life has nevertheless been transformed by a meeting with God which that scant information made possible (60). Implicit in all this, I believe, is the Christian conviction of the living Christ. Jesus is no mere dead historical figure, but a living person who can still be experienced by individuals.

So on my reading, Climacus's answer to Ferreira is to steadfastly maintain that objectivity in the content of one's beliefs is compatible with subjectivity in the grounds. It is undeniable, I think, that to believe meaningfully in Jesus as God one must have some true historical beliefs about Jesus. But why must those beliefs be based on evidence? Why couldn't the beliefs be themselves produced as part of the outcome of the encounter?

To refer successfully to Jesus of Nazareth, some of my beliefs about Jesus must be true, but it seems possible that a person might believe in the historical record because of her faith in Jesus, rather than having faith in Jesus on the basis of the historical record. Of course if the beliefs are false, then they are false, and the person is mistaken; but that risk is unavoidable, and Climacus does not think one should try to avoid it. Nor does the fact that the belief in question is not based on evidence mean that the belief is arbitrary or groundless, since it is *grounded* in the first-person encounter with Jesus.[7] What is required is that this encounter be an experience of Jesus in which true knowledge is given. The situation is analogous to a case of ordinary sense perception in which I come to believe that there is a flower before me because I directly perceive the flower. In such a case I do not normally regard the existence of the flower as something that I infer or conclude on the basis of evidence.

One objection to Climacus's attempt to rest so much on an experience of Jesus as God is that such an experience necessarily rests on a host of background assumptions. Surely a person cannot simply directly come to perceive Jesus as forgiving them, commanding them to do something, or inviting them to faith in the pages of the gospels unless the gospels are indeed an accurate representation of Jesus which provide a reliable means for

becoming aware of Jesus at work in one's life. In a similar way, ordinary sense perception also depends on the truth of various background assumptions. For example, I could not perceive that there is a flower in front of me if the light was not normal, if my eyesight was not functioning normally, and so on. To know that there is a flower in front of me, these other things must be true. Similarly, to know that the historical person Jesus, whom I learn about through historical records, is God speaking to me, certain other things must be true as well. So in both cases, it may be argued, my belief still rests on other evidence, namely the evidence I have for these background beliefs.

This kind of objection rests on a confusion of levels.[8] We should distinguish between *having* a ground for a belief and *knowing* that one has a ground for a belief, between *being* justified and *knowing* that one is justified. For my belief that there is a flower before me to be grounded properly, it is necessary that the light be of a certain sort, that my eyesight be functioning normally, and so on, but it is not necessary for me to know these things or to have evidence that they are so. It is sufficient that they are true. To know *that* my belief is properly grounded I may need to know such things, but that is another matter. In a similar manner, in order to have a properly grounded belief that Jesus is God, it must be the case that Jesus reveals himself in certain ways. But it is not necessary for the individual to know these other things, or have evidence for them, though that may be necessary for the individual to know that her belief is properly grounded.

I conclude that Climacus's position is philosophically defensible, in the sense that there is nothing incoherent in the notion of a historical belief which is grounded in an experience, rather than historical evidence. Whether that is in fact how Christian faith is produced is another matter, of course. To decide that. one must decide whether Jesus is indeed God and whether experiences of Jesus of the appropriate sort are possible.

The Relevance of Historical Evidence for Faith

To revert to the language of the thought experiment, Climacus is probably right in saying that the "scrap of paper" with the words "we have believed that the God appeared among us" could be "more than enough" to be an occasion for faith, should God choose to use that scrap of paper as an occasion to reveal himself. And he is clearly right in saying that no amount of evidence will necessarily produce faith in someone. So strong, historical evidence is neither sufficient nor necessary for faith. Nevertheless, it is difficult to accept the further conclusion he seems to draw, namely that evidence is simply irrelevant to faith.

My worry can be expressed as follows: Certainly God could use a scrap of paper to produce faith. Perhaps he often does produce faith in ways that make evidence irrelevant. But is this always or even normally the case? Since my belief in Jesus is a belief with historical content, it cannot be isolated from my other historical beliefs. Unless God produced my belief by overriding my normal thought processes, it is hard to see how I could regard massive evidence that Jesus never existed, or never said any of the things attributed to him, as utterly irrelevant to my faith. Even a belief which is "properly basic" and grounded in direct perceptual experience is subject to being "defeated" or overridden by contrary evidence. My perceptual belief that there is a live flower in front of me may be overridden, for example, by strong evidence that the object in question is plastic. Similarly, even though I believe that Jesus has revealed himself to me, is it not possible that I am mistaken, and is not the plausibility of that possibility affected by the quality of the evidence I have for Jesus' historical reality?

I believe that the basic worry Climacus has about admitting the relevance of historical evidence for faith is that he does not want the question of faith to be a scholarly question. He does not want to leave the ordinary person who is deciding whether to be a Christian or not in the clutches of the historical scholars, with their endless debates and never-decided controversies. After all, the individual who must decide whether or not to become a Christian is making a decision about how her life should be lived. She does not have the luxury of waiting for the scholars to reach agreement, which will never happen in any case. I sympathize with Climacus's worry on this point, but I believe that this concern can be met without the drastic claim that historical evidence is irrelevant for faith. The actual situation with regard to historical evidence seems to be this. For orthodox Christians, the historical accounts of Jesus' life are regarded as reasonably accurate at least, plenty sufficient for faith, and the evidence for this conclusion is regarded as adequate. For others, the account is much less accurate, and the evidence accordingly less powerful. In extreme cases, skepticism extends to almost all the details of Jesus' life. However, all parties would agree that in reality there is far more evidence than Climacus's "scrap of paper." How much more is a matter of dispute.

Now why is it that the evidence seems adequate to one party and inadequate to the other? Doubtless each side will have its own preferred explanation. Perhaps skeptics will say that wish fulfillment is at work in the believer. Perhaps believers will follow Climacus and say that their own encounter with Jesus is the deciding factor. What I wish to maintain is that it is possible for the believer to follow Climacus in saying this without claiming that histori-

cal evidence is irrelevant. That is, it is possible for a believer to claim that it is significant that we have as much evidence as we have, and even to admit that some people would not find faith to be possible if they did not have evidence of reasonable, even if not decisive quality, while still properly believing that the decision is not, in the end, one which scholarship can settle. Though the evidence by itself would never be sufficient to produce faith in anyone, it is possible that evidence of a certain type might be necessary for faith for some people, though not everyone, since not everyone will have the reflective bent or cognitive capacities to appreciate the force of various possible problems. Faith in this case does not make evidence unimportant or irrelevant; it makes it possible properly to appreciate and assess the evidence, at least so as to be able to know that one's beliefs have not been vanquished by various "defeaters."

To go back to the level distinction we employed earlier, for some people—those of a certain reflective bent—being justified in believing may be linked to believing that they are justified. They want to know that they are justified, and if they lack such knowledge, their faith may be troubled by crippling doubts. Or, more modestly and more plausibly, I think, they at least need to rule out the possibility that their beliefs can be shown to be false. They may need this because they have encountered people who claim to be able to show that their beliefs are false. Such a believer who is troubled by doubt might admit the relevance of historical argument, while still holding to the Climacus-inspired view that what is finally decisive in settling the argument is his own firsthand experience of Jesus.

Such a person is not necessarily thrown back into the clutches of the scholars, even though he may not ignore the work of the scholars altogether. To avoid the specter of an unending scholarly inquiry which never leads to commitment either way, he may only need to believe that there is enough evidence to make the truth of his beliefs possible, and it is hard to see how that weak conclusion could be threatened by scholarship. What the believer must hold is that the evidence is good enough for one whose belief has the ground of a first-person encounter, or perhaps even that the evidence is seen in a different light for one who has had such an encounter. In the latter case the encounter could be understood as transforming the individual, giving her the proper perspective from which to view the evidence, or even as giving her the capacities she needs to appreciate its force.[9] It may be important to have evidence, but the evidence does not need to be of the type that would convince any "sane, rational person," but rather be such as to appear adequate to a person of faith. A view such as this one seems to me to make more sense of the way committed believers actually respond to disturbing historical

evidence. The usual stance is not dismissal of the evidence as irrelevant, but confidence that the contrary evidence will not be decisive.

Evidence for a Paradox: Making the Improbable Probable

Climacus has one further reason for treating historical evidence as insignificant, which might be called the "capital crime" argument. Just as a capital offense "absorbs all lesser crimes," so the paradoxicalness of the incarnation makes minor historical problems insignificant (PF 104). The idea is that the incarnation, being a paradox, is so improbable as to appear absurd. The viability of belief in such a paradox cannot be affected by petty details of the historical records, such as divergencies and contradictions of various witnesses. Its antecedent probability is so low that it cannot be made meaningfully lower; nor could resolving such problems make the probability meaningfully higher. Climacus goes so far as to argue that to try to make the incarnation probable is to falsify its character. The paradox is by definition the improbable, and one could make it probable only by making it into what it is not (94n).

These arguments are strikingly reminiscent of Hume's famous critical attack on miracles. In *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume argues that it could never be reasonable to believe that a miracle has occurred, because a miracle, which is by definition an exception to the laws of nature, is as improbable an event as can be imagined, since the laws of nature describe what normally happens and therefore what one can reasonably expect to occur. Even the best and strongest evidence imaginable for a miracle would only serve to balance and could never overcome this strong a priori improbability.[10]

It is worth inquiring, both for Climacus and Hume, what concept of probability and what assumptions about probability seem to underlie the arguments. The term "probability" is used in both objective and subjective senses. Objectively, to say that an event is probable is to say that it is objectively likely to occur. Thus the probability of a certain outcome when cards are dealt or dice are rolled can be calculated with some precision. We often say that an event is probable, however, when we know nothing about the objective probabilities of the matter. In these cases we mean that it seems likely to us that the event will occur. For example, I may think it is probable that I will receive an exceptionally large raise in salary next year, even though I have no statistical data on which to base such a claim. It is simply rooted in my belief that my work will be recognized and rewarded by the proper authorities. Such a claim is more an expression of my expectancies

than it is a statement about statistical frequencies in the objective world, and such a probability claim is no stronger than the subjective beliefs on which it is based.

Hume's argument appears at first glance to be rooted in objective probability, since it is the infrequency with which laws of nature are violated which makes a miracle improbable. Critics have pointed out, however, that if this is Hume's argument, then it seems to rest on a shallow understanding of how the probability of historical events is estimated. The probability of a historical event cannot be estimated simply from the frequency with which an event of that type occurs, since history is replete with unique events. A French emperor may invade Russia only once in all human history. In estimating the probability of an event, we rely therefore not only on the frequency of the type of event in question but our total knowledge of the situation, including our knowledge of the intentions and characters of whatever historical agents are involved. To think otherwise is to confuse history with dice-rolling or coin-tossing.

Believers in miracles regard miracles as the work of God, who is regarded as a personal agent. To assess the probability of a miracle, therefore, one must do more than consider how frequently they occur. One must consider whether there is a God, whether he is the sort of being who could be expected to do miracles from time to time, in what circumstances this could be expected to occur, and so on. If I believe in a personal God, and believe that God has the ability to intervene in nature, and believe that he is a being who has good reasons to intervene in nature in certain circumstances, then I will estimate the probability of a miracle in those circumstances much more highly than does Hume. Anyone who judges miracles extremely improbable, as does Hume, bases the judgment not merely on objective statistical data, but on a variety of beliefs about other matters. Of course it is possible that Hume or others who judge miracles as extremely improbable have objectively powerful evidence that God does not exist, or that God is not the kind of being who performs miracles, but it seems more likely to me that Hume is actually simply expressing his beliefs about these matters, and the judgment of probability made is therefore of the subjective kind. It seems or appears likely to Hume that miracles do not occur, but of course miracles may not appear nearly so improbable to someone else who holds different convictions about God. Anyone who actually believes that a miracle has occurred will of course believe that the objective probability of that miracle is 1.

I believe that the concept of probability that underlies Climacus's argument is also subjective. Climacus says that the believer must firmly hold to the notion that the incarnation is a paradox and is therefore improbable.

Since the believer thinks the incarnation has actually occurred, however, he cannot believe that the objective probability of the event is low, since the objective probability of an event that has occurred is 1. The meaning must be that the believer understands the event as one that will *appear* improbable to someone who holds certain beliefs. For example, someone such as Hume who believes that miraculous events are in general improbable, will certainly make the same judgment about the idea of a divine incarnation. Anyone who is inclined to think that only events that can be rationally understood can occur, and who also cannot understand how God could become a human being, will think the event improbable. Anyone who is inclined to believe that genuinely unselfish love does not exist will find the idea of God suffering on behalf of human beings similarly improbable. All of this implies that the improbability of the incarnation must be seen as relative to the perspective from which it is viewed.

This conclusion corresponds perfectly with Climacus's own contention that the paradoxicalness of the paradox is a function of sin, which creates the "absolute qualitative distance" between God and human beings (PF 46–47). If, however, the improbability of the paradox is a function of the subjective perspective from which it is viewed, why is the idea of viewing the paradox as probable wrongheaded, as Climacus plainly says? Why is it that the perspective of sinful human beings gains a kind of authority here as the defining perspective? Why should not the believer assert that it is probable to *her*?

The answer surely lies in the fact that Christianity assumes that human beings are actually sinners. This perspective is the perspective that every human being occupies, at least prior to faith. And since the transition from sin to faith is not, for Climacus, a one-time event, but a transition that must continually be renewed, it remains necessary for the believer to define the content of her faith polemically, as that which necessarily is in opposition to the thinking of sinful human beings. The believer is not offended, but the believer is the person who has confronted and continues to confront the possibility of offense. If faith loses its provocative character and no longer confronts our natural patterns of thinking as a rebuke, it has indeed essentially altered its character. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the incarnation is no longer improbable to the believer, simply because it is for her something that has occurred. It is improbable only in the sense that she knows it appears unlikely or improbable to our sinfully corrupted patterns of thought. The event remains improbable in that it was not something we expected to occur.

Does the subjective improbability of the paradox imply that the quality of the historical evidence is of no concern? It might appear so for the unbe-

liever, since the event will appear to him to be massively improbable. Whether this is so depends on how pervasive the corrupting effects of sin are on the intellect. However, I believe that the claim that evidence is of no value whatsoever to the unbeliever is not strictly implied by the requirements of Climacus's hypothetical version of Christianity. The hypothesis requires that people be construed as sinful enough so that they cannot arrive at the Truth apart from an encounter with God, an encounter in which they receive the condition. It is not obvious to me that one aspect of this process of giving the condition could not consist in giving the individual evidence that the God-man is indeed God. Of course the individual's sinfulness may give him a strong tendency to dismiss this evidence, because the fact in question appears so improbable to him. But it seems possible that strong evidence might challenge this presumption of improbability. So long as we are careful to insist that the evidence alone could not produce faith in the individual, then this seems compatible with Climacus's view. No reversion to a Socratic view has occurred.

It also seems possible for evidence to have some value to the believer. Climacus's view to the contrary is surely rooted in his claim that the faith which is the result of the first-person encounter with God does not rest on such evidence. If such a faith is sufficient to overturn the subjective improbability of the event, it will surely not be troubled by flaws in the historical record.

This is essentially the same argument we examined in the previous section and is subject to the same reservations that I expressed there. Perhaps it is true that it is the experience of meeting Jesus that is decisive in altering the natural judgment that God would not become a human being. Thus the experience may be the decisive ground of faith, and the inconclusiveness of scholarly debate may be insignificant to the believer. However, this is compatible with claiming that it is important that there be evidence, at least for some people who are troubled by doubts of a certain kind. The evidence may not be of such a nature as to convince unbelievers, but it may be the kind of evidence that is seen as sufficient when seen through the right eyes.

After all, it is surely possible for someone to doubt whether the experience of Jesus which is the ground of faith is veridical. If we have some reasons to think that Jesus really existed, and really is divine, and has a certain character, and so on, such information could be helpful in resolving such doubts. If I have an experience of someone who appears to be Mother Teresa, I will be much more likely to believe the experience is veridical if I have background information about the reality of Mother Teresa, and about her character, than would be the case if I had never heard of Mother Teresa. Thus

the traditional arguments for the reliability of the gospels, and the testimony provided in the gospels for the claim that Jesus is divine, including the miracles, Jesus' own claims to be divine, the profundity of Jesus' teaching, and especially the resurrection, could be of significance to a believer. They are not sufficient to produce faith, and perhaps not strictly necessary, but they may well be part of what one might call the normal process by which faith comes into being, and they may also have value in confirming faith that is present, helping to relieve doubts and allay various objections.

Traditional Apologetic Arguments

There is little doubt, I think, that the claims I am making run strongly contrary to the intentions of Climacus, who simply can see no value in traditional apologetics. It is instructive to look at Climacus's treatment of what is traditionally cited as evidence. Climacus admits that the God must make his presence known in the world in some way, though he says that every "accommodation for the sake of comprehensibility" is of no value to the person who does not receive the condition, and is therefore "extracted from him [the God] only against his will" (PF 56). I do not see why this should be so.

As Climacus himself says, it surely makes no sense to suppose that the God is literally indistinguishable from any other human being, and that there is no sign which points to his divinity. Of course the gospels meet this requirement in the case of Jesus by presenting him as an authoritative teacher, a worker of miracles, and someone who himself claims to be divine. If the God wills to reveal himself, and if this requires some sign or evidence of his divinity, then it is hard to see why the God should grant such signs only "under constraint and against his will." Even if we grant Climacus the claim that such signs will only be of value to people of faith, though I have given reason to question that claim, it does not follow that the signs are insignificant for those people who do indeed have faith.

Climacus says that miracles cannot help much, as a miracle does not exist immediately but "is only for faith" (PF 93). It is not clear just what this means. The statement could be read as saying that an event becomes a miracle by my belief that it is one. However, this claim is absurd on its face, and in any case directly contradicts a principle Climacus firmly holds, namely that the apprehension of something cannot alter the nature of what is apprehended.[11] If he means that miracles will only be believed by those who have faith, this is possible, though not obvious, but that does not mean that the miracles lack evidential value for those who do possess faith.

Surely Climacus is right when he says that miracles and other evidence do not lead automatically to faith, and that they can indeed lead to offense. If the gospels are accurate, many contemporaries of Jesus observed him perform miracles without becoming disciples, and in fact seem to have been offended by him. However, this does not imply that the miracles are of no value to those people who did possess faith. Certainly, the traditional Christian view is that the "signs" Jesus did are valuable in this way. For example, Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost appeals to the "miracles, wonders, and signs" which God had done among the people through Jesus.[12] So far as I can tell, Climacus's deviation from this traditional Christian view and denigration of historical evidence is unwarranted, even given the basic correctness of his own view of faith and its genesis in the individual.

There is therefore no way to insulate Christian faith completely from the risks of historical criticism. On the other hand, an understanding of the way such historical judgments themselves embody faith-commitments may make it possible for Christians to argue that the historical beliefs that are part of their faith are reasonable enough when viewed in the right context: that context being a faith which is grounded, not in historical evidence, but in a first-hand encounter with Jesus Christ.[13]

Chapter 10

Kierkegaard and Plantinga on Belief in God: Subjectivity as the Ground of Properly Basic Religious Beliefs

In this essay I wish to compare the views and arguments of Alvin Plantinga and Søren Kierkegaard on the question of belief in God. Surprisingly, Kierkegaard's view of belief in God (which must be sharply distinguished from faith in the Absolute Paradox) turns out to be surprisingly similar to Plantinga's claim that belief in God can be properly basic. In fact two of Plantinga's arguments for taking belief in God as properly basic can be seen as basically identical to arguments found in Kierkegaard.

I shall argue that besides the similarities between the two views, Kierkegaard offers an important addition to Plantinga's project. Plantinga claims that though properly basic beliefs are not based on evidence they are nevertheless "grounded." In the latter part of the chapter I show how the Kierkegaardian notion of inwardness or subjectivity must be an essential element in any plausible account of the ground of such belief in God.

Many philosophers would find it odd to consider together the views of Alvin Plantinga, well-known contemporary analytic philosopher of religion, and Søren Kierkegaard, nineteenth-century religious thinker who is widely credited with being the father of existentialism. I shall argue, however, that beneath the very real differences in primary concerns and style that divide the two thinkers, there is an underlying agreement on some central issues in the philosophy of religion. Careful delineation of these points of agreement gives us much clearer insight into each of these thinkers and what they are about. Furthermore, with respect to areas where there are differences, some

of the differences are not disagreements but complementary insights. Each has something important to learn from the other.

The Notion of Belief in God as Properly Basic

In a very important article, "Reason and Belief in God,"[1] Alvin Plantinga has argued, among other things, that belief in God is, at least for some people, "properly basic." He wants to show that it can be "entirely acceptable, desirable, right, proper, and rational to accept belief in God without any argument or evidence whatever."[2]

This notion of proper basicality is explained by Plantinga in terms of the concept of a person's "noetic structure," which is simply "the set of propositions a person believes, together with certain epistemic relations that hold among him and these propositions."[3] In a typical noetic structure, some propositions will be believed on the basis of others. Obviously in many cases a belief which is the basis for another may be itself based on some other belief. Those philosophers which Plantinga terms "classical foundationalists"—and on this point Plantinga is in sympathy with classical foundationalism—maintain that this "basing" relation cannot constitute an infinite series. Actual people must therefore believe some things which are not based on other things they believe. If it is rational for them to hold these beliefs in that manner, then Plantinga terms such beliefs *properly* basic. The claim that belief in God is properly basic is therefore a claim that it is reasonable to include belief in God as part of the foundation of a person's noetic structure.

Actually, two qualifications must be made at this point. Plantinga recognizes that there is a tremendous difference between belief in God and merely believing in the proposition "God exists," yet it is the latter propositional belief which is claimed to be properly basic. This is clearly a point of fundamental importance for Kierkegaard, who places little value in bare propositional belief. Although belief in God is far more than belief in the proposition "God exists," it does, however, include such propositional belief. I believe that Kierkegaard would grant this point, and hence Plantinga's discussion of propositional belief is quite relevant to actual religious faith in the Kierkegaardian sense.[4]

The second qualification is that, strictly speaking, it is not the proposition "God exists" which is properly basic, but propositions like "God is speaking to me," "God has created me," and "God disapproves of what I have done."[5] Yet since propositions of this sort self-evidently entail that God exists, Plantinga thinks there is no harm in speaking a bit loosely and

talking as if the relatively abstract, high-level proposition "God exists" is itself properly basic.[6]

With these two qualifications in mind, I believe there is at least a prima facie similarity between Plantinga's project here and the views of Kierkegaard, at least if Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus accurately represents Kierkegaard's thoughts, and I think that on this point he does. Kierkegaard would certainly stress far more than Plantinga that genuine religious faith is not simply intellectual assent to a proposition, but I do not think he would deny that faith contains cognitive content. A person who believes in God certainly believes that there is a God, just as a person who in faith follows Jesus as the God-man, believes that Jesus exists and that Jesus is the God-man. Kierkegaard would also, I think, welcome Plantinga's second qualification. What is properly basic to a believer in God is not a relatively abstract, high-level proposition like "God exists" but more concrete propositions like "God is to be thanked for sending me this trial" and "God has forgiven me for doing X."[7]

With the two qualifications given, however, Kierkegaard's perspective is really very similar. Since Kierkegaard stresses so strongly that faith in Jesus as the God-man is "absurd," and goes "against reason," it often goes unnoticed, I think, that he does not usually say things like this about belief in God. (I am here focusing solely on belief in God, rather than the paradoxical belief in the God-man.) Rather he seems to believe that a person can have a kind of awareness and even certainty of God's reality, though one which is emphatically not based on intellectual arguments or proofs.

It is true that Johannes Climacus does say very clearly that God cannot be directly present to a person in a sensuous manner. The idea that God can be directly experienced in this way is characterized as paganism (CUP 1:245). However, this by no means implies that Climacus thinks a person cannot be aware of God's reality at all. Nor does his critique of natural theology in chapter 3 of *Fragments* and elsewhere deny this. In fact, one of the major criticisms of natural theology is simply that it makes something which should be certain appear to be uncertain. It gives the impression that one needs an argument to recognize a truth which is, one might say, right before one's nose.

> For to demonstrate the existence (*Tilvær*) of one who is present (*er til*, exists) is the most shameless affront, since it is an attempt to make him ridiculous, . . . How could it occur to one to demonstrate that he exists (*er til*), unless it is because one has first permitted oneself to ignore him; and now one makes the matter still more crazy by demonstrating his existence (*Tilværelse*) before his very nose? A king's existence (*Tilværelse*) or his

> presence (*Tilstedeværelse*) generally has its own characteristic expression of subjection and submission; what if one in his sublime presence (*Nærværlerelse*) wanted to prove that he existed (*var til*)? Would one then prove it? No, one makes a fool of him, for his presence (*Tilstedeværelse*) is demonstrated by an expression of submission . . . and thus one also demonstrates God's existence (*Tilværelse*) by worship—not by proofs. (CUP 1:545–46)

Climacus, then, seems to agree with Plantinga that a person can know God's reality in a direct manner, without any arguments or proof. Climacus, in fact, goes beyond the claim that such arguments are unnecessary to the claim that they are positively harmful, a claim which is echoed in Plantinga's discussion of "Reformed theologians" like Bavinck, Calvin, and Barth, who say very similar things.[8]

Plantinga's Arguments for the Reasonableness of Taking Belief in God as Properly Basic

Kierkegaard is often stigmatized as an irrational fideist, in part because of his attitude towards arguments for God's existence.[9] If Kierkegaard's views here are as similar to Plantinga as I have claimed, then anyone who wishes to evaluate Kierkegaard's view on this issue would do well to pay attention to the arguments Plantinga gives for the reasonableness of taking belief in God as properly basic.

The argument is basically negative in character. That is, Plantinga does not propose a criterion of proper basicality and show that belief in God meets this criterion.[10] Instead, he considers the conditions which others have proposed for proper basicality, which are supposed to exclude belief in God as properly basic, and shows that it is not reasonable to accept those conditions as necessary for proper basicality.

As Plantinga understands the matter, those who have thought that belief in God could not be properly basic have generally been classical foundationalists.[11] Classical foundationalists, by which Plantinga means medieval thinkers like Aquinas,[12] modern classical philosophers like Descartes, and contemporary philosophers like Chisholm, hold that a proposition can be properly basic for someone if and only if it is either self-evident to that person or "evident to the senses" (medieval foundationalists), or self-evident or "incorrigible" (modern and contemporary foundationalists).[13] They have further held that for a proposition to be rationally acceptable it must be either properly basic or based on propositions which are properly basic. Since "God exists" is not self-evident, and is neither evident to the senses (like "some

things are in motion") nor incorrigible (like "I seem to see a tree" or "I am appeared greenly to"), it follows that belief in God cannot be properly basic. Some classical foundationalists, like Aquinas, have thought that belief in God, though not properly basic, could be derived from propositions that were. Others, like Russell, have thought that belief in God was not rational at all. What Plantinga tries to do therefore is to discredit the restrictive claims of classical foundationalism about what can properly go in the foundation.

Essentially, he has two arguments. The first is that classical foundationalism entails that we are not rationally justified in accepting many propositions which we all in fact believe and regard as rational. Plantinga believes that it can be shown that propositions that entail that "there are enduring physical objects, or that there are persons distinct from myself, or that the world has existed for more than five minutes" cannot be rationally accepted if classical foundationalism is true.[14] The reason is simply that such propositions are neither self-evident, evident to the senses, nor incorrigible; nor can any of them be shown to be more probable than not on the basis of what is self-evident or incorrigible. Plantinga feels it would be irrational to regard these beliefs as irrational; hence if classical foundationalism entails this, then classical foundationalism is irrational.

Plantinga's second argument against classical foundationalism is that the foundationalist position is self-referentially inconsistent. The foundationalist accepts this proposition: "A is properly basic for me only if A is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for me."[15] Yet this proposition is not itself properly basic, since it is not self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses, and no one knows any good arguments for this proposition which are based on what is self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses. Since the classical foundationalist holds that it is irrational to accept a belief unless the belief meets one of those two conditions, it is evidently irrational for a classical foundationalist to accept this proposition.

Plantinga concludes that there is no basis for the charge that it is irrational for someone to take belief in God as properly basic. Someone who does so "is not violating any epistemic duties or revealing a defect in his noetic structure . . . the correct or proper way to believe in God . . . is to take belief in God as basic."[16]

If Plantinga's arguments are strong here, then it seems that Kierkegaard cannot justifiably be called an irrational fideist on the basis of his view that it is proper for a person to believe in God without any arguments or proof. Kierkegaard's position here is a version of what Plantinga has termed "Reformed Epistemology," though perhaps a Kierkegaardian would prefer to term the position "Lutheran epistemology."

Could Kierkegaard Accept Plantinga's Arguments against Classical Foundationalism?

Kierkegaard's main epistemological target was not classical foundationalism but Hegelian idealistic coherentism. Hence it is hardly to be expected that the epistemological underpinnings he provides for his views would exactly parallel Plantinga's. Nevertheless, I believe that when one considers Kierkegaard's views in their historical contexts, there are arguments present which are roughly analogous to the two arguments Plantinga presents against classical foundationalism. This makes it plausible, I think, to speculate that a contemporary Kierkegaardian might well find Plantinga's arguments appealing.

The first Kierkegaardian argument to be considered is again from Climacus in the "Interlude" to *Philosophical Fragments*. There, drawing on ancient skepticism, Climacus argues that all factual knowledge, all knowledge of what has "come into existence," is dependent on "faith" (82). The reason this is so is that the apprehension of what has "come into existence" always involves some degree of uncertainty, which must be resolved by faith.

This Kierkegaardian passage is often thought to lean on a voluntaristic view of belief. In one passage Climacus says that "doubt can be overcome only in freedom, by an act of will" (PF 82). On this interpretation Kierkegaard is basically arguing that faith is a free, and ultimately ungrounded act. But since faith is required to acquire all of our beliefs about matters of fact, there is no reason to think faith can be avoided with respect to religious knowledge, or that it should be.

This "voluntaristic" reading of the passage has some plausibility. One finds a clear statement of this view in Terence Penelhum's very insightful book *God and Skepticism*[17] and in Louis Pojman's *The Logic of Subjectivity*.[18] If this is Kierkegaard's view, however, it is open to strong objections, since beliefs do not usually appear to be under our voluntary control in this manner.

I myself do not believe that this voluntaristic reading of the Climacus material is correct, primarily because it fails to take account of the extent to which "willing" in Kierkegaard is bound up with the related phenomena of the unconscious and self-deception. To say that I am committed to a position because I have freely willed it is for Kierkegaard by no means to imply that I am conscious of having voluntarily chosen it; still less does it imply that I have the power to alter the commitment.[19]

Regardless of who is right on the question of interpretation, the more interesting question is whether or not a sound point can be salvaged (or reconstructed) from the Kierkegaardian position. If the alleged voluntarism

of Climacus is discarded, the logical core which remains seems to be this: if a person tried to exclude from his noetic structure all those beliefs which were not objectively certain (self-evident or incorrigible) he would exclude all beliefs about matters which have "come into existence" (beliefs like "the world is more than five minutes old" or "there are other beings with minds"). Since all people except complete, consistent skeptics (i.e., all people) do include such beliefs in their noetic structures, one cannot reasonably demand that people limit their belief acquisitions to what is objectively certain. People somehow commit themselves or find themselves committed to beliefs which go beyond what is self-evident, or incorrigible, or derivable from what is self-evident or incorrigible.

Climacus says this shows the impact of the will on the acquisition of beliefs, and some thereby take him to mean that people can simply decide what to believe and what not to believe directly. I myself think that Climacus is quite aware of how difficult it is to modify a belief (note his comments on how difficult genuine skepticism really is), and therefore in speaking of "will" wants only to highlight our ultimate personal *responsibility* for our beliefs (since we can to a large extent modify them indirectly over time, and in cases where we are unable to modify them our inability is often grounded in aspects of our character we have freely assumed and are therefore responsible for). But in any case, the point remains that a reasonable person believes many things that are neither self-evident, incorrigible, or derivable from what is self-evident or incorrigible. Kierkegaard would concur with Plantinga's criticism of classical foundationalism.

It is important not to misread Kierkegaard or Plantinga here. They are not attempting to argue for skepticism and then use skepticism as a basis for fideism, as Penelhum assumes.[20] That is, it is not an argument that since no one really knows anything, the religious believer is as entitled to his "leaps of faith" as anyone else. Rather, the assumption is that we do know some things, but that it must be conceded that our actual knowledge is not derivable solely from what is objectively certain. A subjective contribution must be acknowledged.

Plantinga puts this point in a perspicuous manner. He says that a natural worry for someone who rejects classical foundationalism is whether or not just any belief could be properly basic. Could, for example, a belief in the Great Pumpkin be properly basic? Plantinga says no. The Reformed Epistemologist may hold that God has implanted in us a natural tendency to see his hand in the world around us, but "the same cannot be said for the Great Pumpkin, there being no Great Pumpkin and no natural tendency to accept beliefs about the Great Pumpkin."[21]

This seems terribly high-handed and question-begging, but it is not. The basis of Plantinga's claim here is his conviction that the proper way to come up with criteria of what is rational to hold as properly basic, or to believe at all, is to rely, in a broad sense, on *induction.*[22] That is, one cannot hope to suspend all beliefs in a Cartesian manner until one has criteria of rationally acceptable beliefs. Rather one must begin with our actual commitments, what we are subjectively willing to accept as rational, and use these commitments as examples to test hypotheses about epistemological criteria. To me it is obvious that this puts personal commitments—subjectivity in a Kierkegaardian sense—into the heart of the knowing process.

Self-referential Inconsistency and Absentmindedness

Plantinga's second argument against classical foundationalism, it will be recalled, was that the classical foundationalist was self-referentially inconsistent in believing a principle (restrict your beliefs to what is self-evident, incorrigible, or derivable from what is self-evident or incorrigible) which cannot be rationally accepted, because it undermines itself. Essentially this argument is a claim that the attempt to eliminate subjectivity from the knowing process backfires because the very attempt is rooted in subjectivity.

This argument is, like the former one of Plantinga's, at least Kierkegaardian in spirit. It recalls the many jests of Johannes Climacus against the Hegelian claim to have achieved the ability to think from the perspective of absolute spirit. From Climacus's viewpoint this was an attempt to eliminate subjectivity and assume the standpoint of "pure thought" (CUP 1:308). Such a standpoint Climacus regards as ethically unjustifiable, since it is every person's duty first to live as a human being, a task which is by no means exhausted by speculative thinking. Nevertheless, he says that one does an "injustice" to the "objective tendency" by simply attacking it on ethical grounds, since in that case "one has nothing in common with what is under attack" (1:124). I think Climacus simply means by this that such a criticism will be shrugged off by the "pure thinker" as irrelevant, since such a thinker sees his project as essentially disinterested understanding. Instead Climacus says that one must begin with the "comical," which lies within the sphere of the metaphysical (1:124).

The comical aspect of the project of pure thought is that it is a project of a thinker who is never pure. The thinker who neglects his own existence is systematically "absentminded" (CUP 1:301). The decision to think abstractly is not itself abstract, but the act of an existing individual (1:314–15). Besides being immoral, it is impossible to think in a way that precludes one's being an

existing individual, limited in knowledge and experience, permeated by commitments and passions which are not justifiable by any thought which occurs antecedent to and uncontaminated by those passions and commitments. There is what Plantinga would call a "self-referential inconsistency" between the claims of the "pure thinker" and the actual situation such a thinker must recognize.

Seeking a Ground for Properly Basic Beliefs

So far my project has basically been to point out parallels between Kierkegaard and Plantinga in their positions, and to suggest that Plantinga's arguments and their Kierkegaardian analogues provide reasons to absolve Kierkegaard from the charge of irrational fideism, to the degree that this charge is rooted in his espousal of belief in God without any philosophical basis. In the remainder of the paper, I want to suggest that Kierkegaard has something to add to Plantinga's project: a fleshing out of the notion that properly basic beliefs are nonetheless grounded.

Plantinga says clearly that though belief in God is properly basic, it does not follow that such belief is *groundless*.[23] By this he means, I think, that though belief in God is not based on arguments or on any other beliefs, or any evidence understandable in terms of knowing something expressible in propositional form, such a belief is nevertheless not arbitrary. *Something* underlies the belief and makes it reasonable for me to hold the belief. Plantinga expresses this by speaking of "justifying circumstances."[24]

When we look at propositions like "I see a tree," "I had breakfast this morning," and "That person is in pain," we find that when these propositions are properly basic for me, it is because of characteristic experiences like "being appeared treely to," or seeing someone display typical pain behavior, for example. It is not that I *infer* the beliefs in question from any other beliefs, but that certain experiences play a crucial role in both forming and justifying the beliefs in question. Thus for every properly basic belief "there will be some true proposition of the sort 'In condition C, S is justified in taking p as basic.'"[25]

Plantinga says a similar story can be told about belief in God. There are "justifying circumstances" for the belief.[26] God has created us in such a way that certain characteristic experiences trigger a natural tendency or disposition to believe in God. "There is in us a disposition to believe propositions of the sort *this flower was created by God* or *this vast and intricate universe was created by God* when we contemplate the flower or behold the starry heavens or think about the vast reaches of the universe."[27]

It is of course hardly surprising that atheists and religious skeptics find this account less than convincing. Why, they ask, is it the case that virtually everyone has a natural tendency to believe in trees when appeared to treely, while great numbers of people seem to have no tendency to believe in God when they see a flower?

The obvious move at this point for Plantinga is to suggest that our natural tendency to believe in God has been "overlaid or suppressed by sin."[28] The atheist may find this a cheap victory, since it smacks of *ad hominem*. Plantinga could at this point shrug and say that he is simply telling it like it is, and if the atheist does not agree, that is the atheist's problem. (I am not suggesting that this is in fact what Plantinga would do.) There are, however, some good reasons not to break off the conversation so abruptly.

First, some of the atheists who find this move a little high-handed may not be hostile opponents, but sincere seekers, honestly looking for an account of the reasonableness of belief in God which they can accept. Secondly, some of the people who find this story of the natural tendency to believe in God dubious are not atheists at all, but believers who think one can and should have arguments for God's existence. Of course the sin that overrides this natural tendency may be at work in believers as well as unbelievers. Nevertheless, in the light of all those who find such an account dubious, it is worthwhile to see if the conversation can be continued. Is there anything Plantinga can do to make his account more plausible?

I believe that the answer is "yes." Plantinga himself sees part of what is needed: "There are therefore many conditions and circumstances that call forth belief in God: guilt, gratitude, danger, a sense of God's presence, a sense that he speaks, perception of various parts of the universe. A complete job would explore the phenomenology of all these conditions and of more besides."[29]

Such a phenomenology of the conditions which serve as the ground of belief in God would be helpful in two ways. First, a fuller account would make it more understandable why the tendency is actualized in some but not others. Secondly, this fuller account of the ground of belief in God would provide the honest seeker with a point of contact. Such an account would need to be accompanied by a fuller account of the action of sin in suppressing or overlaying this natural tendency to believe. Just what is sin, and why does it have this effect? Particularly, why does it have this effect on some people and not on others?

Subjectivity as the Ground of Belief in God

What I want to suggest is that a good part of this fuller phenomenology of the ground of belief in God has been provided for Plantinga by Kierkegaard. In providing this fuller account Kierkegaard also gives a plausible, non-ad-hoc explanation of why belief in God lacks the universality of many types of properly basic beliefs, and also why many believers do not see belief in God as properly basic.

We have already noted that Plantinga thinks that at least some properly basic beliefs are triggered in certain circumstances because of certain natural tendencies or dispositions, whose operation is, however, impaired in the case of belief in God because of sin. What Kierkegaard adds to this account is that all such "natural knowledge" in the case of religious knowledge is conditioned by what Kierkegaard calls "inwardness" or "subjectivity."[30] It is of course a daunting task to say what "inwardness" is for Kierkegaard. Here I will simply say that by "inwardness" Kierkegaard means to refer to the central enduring concerns that give shape and substance to the personality, concerns that have both a dispositional character ("a willingness to renounce the relative for the sake of the absolute") and an episodic character ("passion is momentary"). (How something can have both kinds of characteristics is an interesting story, not to be told here.) These concerns are not simply "naturally" present in the individual; they are formed, and the individual has the ability to assist or retard their development. Those concerns which are essential to becoming a true self have a moral and religious character, and they are closely tied to a distinctive type of self-understanding.

By claiming that an awareness of God is conditioned by inwardness, Kierkegaard certainly means that experiences such as guilt and gratitude, which Plantinga refers to as "justifying circumstances," can give rise to religious knowledge. But he does not mean to exclude experiences of the vastness or complexity of nature. He merely wants to insist that such experiences lead to an awareness of God only when they are mediated by the proper kind of subjectivity. "Within the individual person there is a potentiality (a human person is potentially spirit) which is awakened in inwardness to a God-relationship, and then it becomes possible to see God everywhere" (CUP 1:246–47).

An enormous part of Kierkegaard's literature is devoted to descriptions and analyses of inwardness, and, insofar as one human being can do so for another, attempts to help others develop these qualities. In the remainder of this essay, I do not wish to try to summarize those descriptions, an enormous job indeed.[31] Rather, I want to try to sketch why Kierkegaard thinks the

knowledge of God should be thus dependent on inwardness. The fact that religious knowledge is conditioned by inwardness has several desirable consequences, consequences which make it plausible to think that if God does exist, then this is precisely how one would expect him to make possible a knowledge of himself. I will briefly describe some of these consequences.

1. *If the knowledge of God is conditioned by inwardness, human freedom is protected*. A loving God would want human beings to serve him freely and out of love. Since God is omnipotent and omniscient, if his presence were too obvious to human beings, it is evident that many who do not really love God would find it prudent to worship and serve him, for self-interested reasons. In that case such people would really be coerced into serving God, and their freedom would be severely curtailed. By only making himself known to those with a certain type of moral/religious concern, God ensures that a knowledge of himself is not forced on those who are really unwilling to serve him.

2. *If the knowledge of God is conditioned by inwardness, human equality is protected.* It is an article of faith with Kierkegaard that God is impartial, "no respecter of persons." If the knowledge of God were conditioned by intellectual acuity, this principle would be violated, since humans are obviously unequal in intelligence. Kierkegaard, however, believes that all human beings are essentially equal in their capacity for inwardness. Moral and religious passion can be found equally in the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, the intelligent and the simple. Basing religious knowledge on inwardness makes it clear how such knowledge can be equally available to all without being universally present.

3. *If the knowledge of God is conditioned by inwardness, then the process of coming to know God will be a process in which the individual is spiritually developed*. In the last section of *Practice in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus discusses the theme that Christ will "draw all people to himself" (157–62). One of the major themes he develops in this context is that Christ draws people to himself without attempting to entice, allure, or seduce them. This is grounded in a tender care for the spiritual well-being of the individual. Since God is the individual's highest good, it would be absurd to maintain that the process of coming to know God would be one which leads away from personal growth. If, however, the knowledge of God is conditioned by the development of those very qualities which are crucial to the development of a self in the crucial sense of the term "self," then it is sure to be the case that coming to know God will make the individual more truly himself or herself.

4. *If the knowledge of God is conditioned by inwardness, then it is ensured that the person who becomes aware of God becomes aware of God's true nature*. Kierkegaard holds that since God is spirit, he cannot be known in just any

fashion, but only through a spiritual relationship. The absurdity of thinking that belief in God could be grounded in anything else is argued by way of a humorous thought experiment. Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus asks us to imagine a social conformist who lacks inwardness and therefore has no true awareness of God. Perhaps God might be able to help this person by appearing to him in some unusual form. Maybe such a person could see God if God were to take the form of "a very rare and tremendously large green bird, with a red beak, sitting in a tree on the embankment, and perhaps even whistling in an unheard of manner" (CUP 1:245). The problem with this idea is of course that the social conformist might thereby become aware of God but he would not become aware of God as God. He would still totally lack any knowledge of God's true character.

If, however, the knowledge of God is conditioned by inwardness, the situation is totally different. For the person who has properly developed such inward passions as gratitude, guilt, and repentance will be in the proper situation to understand such divine qualities as "the gracious giver of every good gift," "the one who offers forgiveness," and "the one who empowers the individual to make a new beginning." Also, it will be clear that the experiences and "justifying circumstances" in question will not be accidental happenings in the life of the believer. They will be normal occurrences which are made possible by certain long-term inner virtues of the believer.

Subjectivity and Sin

Making the knowledge of God conditional upon inwardness is therefore a plausible view of religious knowledge in itself. It is no ad hoc device to save religious knowledge from refutation. Nevertheless, this view also explains in a convincing manner why the knowledge of God is less than universal.

First of all, we can now say why it is that sin blocks the operation of the natural tendency or disposition which God has placed in humans. For Kierkegaard sin can be described as a failure to become one's true self or as a rebellion against God. These are basically equivalent because one can only be one's true self through being grounded in God, and God commands each of us to become our true selves. One becomes one's true self through the development of the right kind of subjectivity, through developing the right kinds of passion. To sinfully fail to become a self is therefore to lack the proper kind of inwardness, and this means that one's ability to know God will be blocked or severely hampered.

Obviously, this also explains the lack of universality. Since the disposition to believe in God only operates properly when the proper inwardness is

present, the lack of such inwardness obviously means the operation of the disposition will be retarded in many. (It does not follow from the universality of sin that this disposition would be blocked in everyone, nor that it would be retarded to the same degree in everyone, since sin may have various effects on the personality, and in any case God could providentially override the effects of sin in some cases.)

We can also explain why it is that some who believe in God nevertheless fail to see that his reality can be properly basic and think that one needs arguments to believe properly in God. There are at least two possible types of believers here. First, there may be those whose belief *is* properly basic, but who are unaware of this fact. They may be confident of God's reality by virtue of a disposition to believe in him, which is mediated by inwardness, but fail to realize the true status of their belief. They accept various arguments or proofs and believe that *these* are the basis of their belief, when in fact it is their confidence in God's reality which underlies their acceptance of these proofs. Or, they may sense that such a belief is basic for them (or perhaps for others) but fail to realize that holding a belief in this manner can be proper.

The second group of theists who do not accept the claim that belief in God can be properly basic consists of those for whom such a belief is not in fact properly basic. This is possible because of the ambiguity of the term "believer." When we speak of someone as a "believer in God" we may mean *merely* that such a person believes certain propositions such as "God exists." Yet to be a believer in the decisive Christian sense, one must possess a kind of faith which does not consist merely in an intellectual belief, but in passionate inward qualities like trust. Clearly there are many theists who believe in the former sense but not in the latter. Thus there may be many people who are not atheists, nominal believers, or parts of Christendom in Kierkegaard's polemical sense, who lack the requisite inwardness, or lack it to a degree which impairs the natural tendency or disposition to believe in God. And even people who possess genuine faith which is more than intellectual assent may be in a similar position, since sin continues to operate in the lives of believers as well as unbelievers.

My conclusions are simple: (1) Alvin Plantinga's view of belief in God as properly basic provides an illuminating way to understand Kierkegaard's view of belief in God. (2) Kierkegaard's view of inwardness or subjectivity as conditioning the knowledge of God provides an illuminating way of fleshing out Plantinga's suggestion that belief in God, though not based on any arguments or evidence, is nonetheless grounded and in some sense justified.

Chapter 11

Externalist Epistemology, Subjectivity, and Christian Knowledge: Plantinga and Kierkegaard

I should like in this chapter to address one of the most fundamental questions that faces a Christian believer: how does a follower of Jesus Christ know that Christianity is true? I realize that to pose this question I must make many assumptions that I cannot here argue for properly. My main strategy will be to examine the answers to the question given by the contemporary American philosopher Alvin Plantinga and the nineteenth-century Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard. There is, I shall suggest, a common core to their answers, and I believe that this core answer is a defensible one. First, however, I shall lay some of my key assumptions on the table, so to speak.

I assume, for example, that there is such a thing as truth, affirming with Aristotle that "to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."[1] I shall not here commit to any particular philosophical theory as to what this implies. However, I take it that if I affirm that "Jesus died to atone for human sins," this affirmation is false if there was no such person as Jesus, or if Jesus did not die, or if Jesus died but his death had no relevance to human sin; it is true if Jesus did in fact die for the sake of atoning for human sins.

Second, I assume that part—and of course only a part—of what it means to be a Christian is to believe certain doctrines or dogmas. To believe these doctrines is precisely to believe they are true in the sense described in the previous paragraph. It is true that many of the doctrines are such that they cannot properly be believed in what might be called a purely intellectual way. They are meant to engage the affections and rouse the believer to a

certain kind of life. Nevertheless, belief is not reducible to these pragmatic functions, and the individual who does not believe in God or believe that God has acted in Jesus to make possible the forgiveness of sins cannot be moved by these beliefs in the right manner. (Though it is of course possible that someone who did not believe could be moved in certain ways merely by the *story* of the gospel, even if the person considered the story to be fictional. Such a person, however, would not be moved by his or her *belief*.)

What beliefs do I have in mind? What are the doctrines that are essential to Christian faith? Nothing in my paper depends on a precise answer to this difficult, vexed question. Nevertheless, I have in mind what we might call the main outlines of the Christian gospel as it has been understood by all the major branches of Christendom—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. This is what C. S. Lewis referred to as "mere Christianity." As a rough and ready first approximation, we might say that mere Christianity consists of those doctrines affirmed in the ecumenical creeds recognized by all of the three major branches of Christendom. Perhaps we could add to these doctrines any other claims agreed to by all those Christians committed to the truth of the doctrines contained in those creeds.

Is there such a thing as mere Christianity? Vincent of Lerins refers to the universal teaching of the church as "that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all."[2] One might think that nothing satisfies such a criterion. Are there not many versions of Christianity with notorious disputes about doctrines between the various churches? It is indeed difficult today to find any Christian doctrine that is not denied by someone who still calls himself or herself a Christian. Yet if we limit the relevant community to those believers seriously committed to the ecumenical creeds, then mere Christianity would, as a set of doctrines, be identical with those beliefs held in common by this entire community or perhaps those held by nearly all of it.

Mere Christianity in this sense would include what Jonathan Edwards called "the great things of the gospel." I shall not attempt an exhaustive list of what those "great things" are, but all branches of Christendom agree that God, conceived as a personal being who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and completely good, exists and is the creator of everything other than himself, "all that is, seen and unseen," in the language of the Nicene Creed. This God is Trinitarian, three-in-one, and has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Human persons, though made in God's image, have sinned against God and broken the relationships that God intended for humans to have with himself, other persons, and the natural order. Through the incarnation of the Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, God acted decisively in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to atone for human sinfulness and overcome

its devastating effects. Through faith in Jesus human persons can even now begin to enjoy new life with God and to become part of God's people, the Church. God promises to complete the story with the triumphal return of Christ, the final overcoming of sin, and the triumph of God.

In assuming that the elements of this story can be believed to be true, I assume they can be intelligibly *thought*. A large strand of theology since Kant has doubted that it is possible to conceive of God, has claimed that it is not possible for human language to refer to a God who is not a part of the temporal, created world. Of course if we cannot conceive of God, then we also cannot conceive of God creating the world or atoning for sin through the person of Jesus. And if such things cannot be conceived they cannot be believed either. Space does not permit a reply to this skeptical position in this essay. I can only say that the theologians who claim that we cannot conceive of God or meaningfully speak of God seem to me to base their claim on inadequate theories of language, theories that have been well-criticized in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion.[3]

Ambitious and Modest Epistemology

The Christian story is truly an amazing story. How can it be known to be true? Naturally, any answer to such a question plunges us into the realm of epistemology. Any account we might give as to how Christianity could be known to be true clearly will presuppose some view of what knowledge is and how it is gained. So what kind of epistemology shall we assume in order to answer my question?

In my book *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith* I distinguish what I term "ambitious" epistemology from "modest" epistemology.[4] The two types of epistemology embody different projects; they have different aims. The aims of ambitious epistemology include the refutation of skepticism. This becomes explicit in the writings of such contemporary thinkers as Keith Lehrer, who describes the successful epistemologist as being able to vanquish the skeptic in a kind of dialectical game.[5] To this aim of the refutation of skepticism I would add a further goal: to provide a certification or guarantee for knowledge claims. If someone worries about the status of quantum physics or religious knowledge or economic theory, the epistemologist is supposed to save the day by showing that the knowledge claims that have been questioned have strong credentials.

The two aims are connected. A refutation of the skeptic would provide the ultimate certification or guarantee that knowledge is genuine, for the skeptic is conceived as someone who will doubt whenever it is possible to

doubt. There is a close connection between ambitious epistemology and classical foundationalism, the type of epistemology associated with such modern philosophers as Descartes and Locke. I will describe classical foundationalism as involving a twofold claim: (1) Our human noetic structure must have foundations, beliefs that are basic and therefore are not grounded in any other beliefs, but which provide the ultimate justification for all other beliefs. (2) A rational person accepts as basic only those beliefs that are highly certain.

There are of course disagreements between various philosophers about which beliefs possess the requisite certainty, but the prime candidates are beliefs that are either self-evident, incorrigible (in the way beliefs about a person's own mental states are often alleged to be for that person), or evident to the senses. It is no accident that ambitious epistemology has often gravitated in the direction of classical foundationalism, for if it is the task of epistemology to certify that knowledge is genuine and to refute the skeptic, it must appeal to something that is impervious to skepticism, something that is highly certain indeed.

Even if ambitious epistemology eschews classical foundationalism, for example by espousing some form of coherentism that sees our belief structures as mutually supporting webs that have no beliefs serving as absolute foundations, it is still foundationalist in the sense that it sees itself as a foundational discipline. If epistemology is supposed to provide certification for knowledge claims, it cannot itself presuppose any controverted knowledge claims, for its goal is precisely to provide a foundational guarantee for such claims.

Modest epistemology is a different enterprise with quite different aims. Modest epistemology assumes that knowledge is possible and that we can identify some of the things we know. The goal of the modest epistemologist is not to refute the skeptic; he or she assumes that the skeptic is wrong. He or she agrees with Hume and Kierkegaard that complete skepticism is impossible, but that if such a state could be realized, it would be incurable by reason.[6] Thus the skeptic cannot be refuted but does not have to be. The goal of epistemology is simply to become clearer about what knowledge is and how we get it. It stands to reason that the modest epistemologist will be open to the possibility that knowledge does not require absolutely certain foundations. If we have some beliefs in our noetic structure that are basic, perhaps they do not have to be absolutely certain.

The most extreme form of modest epistemology would be what has been termed "epistemology naturalized," in which the question of what knowledge is and how it is obtained is viewed purely as an empirical ques-

tion, to be answered by psychologists and sociologists.[7] A more traditional conception of epistemology, which preserves its normative character, can be found in the writings of the late Roderick Chisholm. Chisholm argued that epistemology is an *inductive* enterprise, taking the conception of induction in a very broad sense.[8] To do his or her work, the epistemologist begins with examples of knowledge and examples of beliefs that do not amount to knowledge and reflects on them so as to discern the principles that underlie our knowledge. Perhaps the acceptance of the knowledge claims that underlies this procedure is only provisional. It is possible that having reflected on our examples and developed some general principles, we will return to our initial knowledge claims and modify our starting point. Some things we thought we knew perhaps are not really knowledge; perhaps we know some things that we did not know we knew. It is inconceivable, however, that through such a process we would completely reject the knowledge we began by assuming we had.

It is worth noting that modest epistemology was not developed primarily by philosophers of religion looking for a way to bolster religious truth claims, but by secular philosophers for their own purposes. The enterprise has been developed primarily by naturalistic philosophers convinced that knowing is itself a natural process. Therefore, modest epistemology was not motivated by any special pleading on behalf of religion.

Obviously, the modest epistemologist gives up any pretensions that he or she can supply some kind of universal guarantee or certification for knowledge claims, since the enterprise depends on accepting some knowledge claims at the outset, at least provisionally. The philosopher on this view may give us insight into what we know and how we know it. However, it is not the case that until the philosopher comes to the rescue by providing his or her certificate of authenticity, the scientist or theologian or moral agent is necessarily in some kind of crisis, either bereft of knowledge or rationality or both.

Which type of epistemological project should we pursue? Perhaps we could work at both, though presumably not at the same time. It is easy to see why ambitious epistemology still appeals to many people. Nicholas Wolterstorff claims that classical foundationalism has its origins in the cultural anxiety that characterized the fracturing of the medieval tradition, the intellectual and religious conflicts that appeared with the Reformation and the scientific revolution.[9] Extended disagreements, particularly disagreements that sometimes lead to violent conflict, naturally produce a desire for a method of resolving such disagreements once and for all. The history of modern philosophy is the search for such a method, though Descartes, Locke, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel—to name just a few of the

important players—by no means agree among themselves as to what the proper method is. Since the contemporary world is, if anything, more aware of such disagreements, it is no surprise that the ideal—a foundational discipline that will allow us to sort out dubious intellectual claims from genuine knowledge—is still potent.

Nevertheless, I would argue that the main lesson of the history of modern philosophy is that no such method is available to us human beings, finite and historically situated as we are. Whatever knowledge we have is fallible, and the desire to overcome disagreements by embarking on what John Dewey termed "the quest for certainty" is a quixotic one. Ambitious epistemology has had a good run, and there is little agreement as to how to solve its problems. Great efforts have been devoted to refuting skepticism: attempting to prove that we are not deceived by all-powerful demons, or to show that we are not brains in vats being electrically stimulated by a race of super-scientists. Even such apparently modest tasks as proving that other people have minds or that the universe is more than five minutes old have proved elusive. Perhaps Thomas Reid is right when he claims, alluding to Descartes' mention of people who believe their heads are made of glass, that such maladies cannot be healed by philosophy.[10]

I shall therefore assume the stance of the modest epistemologist in this chapter. We do not have to go as far as Quine and abandon any concern with normative issues. I believe, however, that it is not possible to reflect on knowledge, justification, rationality, and other key epistemological concepts without presupposing some actual knowledge.

Internalism and Externalism

There are many different desirable epistemic qualities: we want beliefs that are justified, rational, warranted, and true, to name just a few. These qualities have often been confusedly run together, but Alvin Plantinga's recent work in epistemology has usefully tried to distinguish them.[11] Plantinga considers justification to be mainly a deontological concept. To be justified is to have fulfilled one's epistemic duties, to be within one's epistemic rights in one's beliefs and belief-forming practices. Rationality comes in many forms, but primarily has to do with the coherence of our beliefs as a system, "downstream from experience," as is sometimes said. Plantinga argues at some length that these epistemic qualities, valuable as they may be, are not the crucial qualities that turn true beliefs into knowledge. A person can be well-justified in holding a belief and eminently rational, and yet that belief, even if true, may not amount to knowledge. For that quality, whatever it may be,

that is sufficient to make true belief into knowledge, Plantinga uses the term "warrant." For him the most crucial questions in epistemology concern the nature of warrant and how our beliefs get that quality.

Plantinga's own account of warrant clearly aligns him on the externalist side of the contemporary epistemological debate between *internalism* and *externalism*. The externalist typically holds that what makes a true belief knowledge is that it is produced by a reliable process—one that normally produces true beliefs (as in reliabilism)—or that it is based on an objectively good truth-conducive ground (William Alston's view), or (as in Plantinga's own view) that it is the result of "cognitive faculties functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at the production of true belief."[12] Internalists, by contrast, hold that warrant (to use Plantinga's terminology) must be a quality that I can discern that I possess by reflecting on my own mental states, those states said to be "internal" to my consciousness. From the perspective of externalism, it is clear that whether the warrant necessary for knowledge is present is not always something that can be determined by the knower simply by "reflecting on his state of mind," to use Roderick Chisholm's phrase. Whether a belief-forming process is reliable, or whether a belief's "ground" is objectively truth-conducive, or whether my faculties are functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment are things that a person cannot immediately know simply by reflecting on her own consciousness.

Internalism holds that a true belief formed in such a way does not amount to knowledge unless the knower can *ascertain* that the belief has these favorable qualities. It is not enough to have a true belief that is connected in the right way to whatever it is about in the objective world (assuming the belief is about that world). We must be able to tell that the belief is connected in this way to the world.

It is easy to see the appeal of internalism for ambitious epistemology. If we wish to refute the skeptic and to give knowledge claims a certificate of authenticity, then internalism looks more promising. For the externalist surely must admit that it is possible for us to know without knowing that we know or how we know. For the externalist, we may sometimes think we know when we do not. Of course, the internalist admits this possibility as well, but the internalist claims that we possess the resources for a remedy. The resources for telling whether knowledge is present (assuming the truth of a belief) are internal to our consciousness. Such is not the case for the externalist, who, as we shall later see, has a more robust sense of our human finitude and dependency.

Though externalism is not well-suited to satisfy the ambitious epistemologist, it may be entirely satisfactory to the modest epistemologist, who begins by assuming we know some things and feels no need to provide knowledge-claims with a foundational guarantee. And there are other things to be said on behalf of the externalist. For example, is the internalist guilty of arbitrariness in requiring that human belief-producing processes be certified by conscious human reflection? For how do we know that such reflection is itself reliable? Thomas Reid asks, if we begin by trusting our rational powers of reflection, why we should not trust our other basic powers as well:

> The skeptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and if it is not the right the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. Reason, says the skeptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded in reason. Why sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception?—they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another.[13]

I shall therefore proceed by assuming an externalist perspective on human knowledge.

I shall attempt to answer my initial question about how a Christian can know the truth of Christianity by looking at the answers to this question given by Alvin Plantinga and Søren Kierkegaard. The account I shall give of Kierkegaard's views is taken mostly from *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Strictly speaking, I should not speak of Kierkegaard here but of the pseudonymous author of these two books that Kierkegaard created, Johannes Climacus. I shall, however, in this essay simply speak of Kierkegaard, partly because the views historically associated with Kierkegaard mostly come from those two works, and partly because I think one can defend the claim that although Johannes Climacus is certainly a character distinct from Kierkegaard, for the most part his views on the issues I address are similar to Kierkegaard's.[14] I shall try to show that Kierkegaard and Plantinga give accounts, which are at bottom surprisingly similar, of how Christians can hold their basic Christian convictions, though of course I do not mean to suggest there are not interesting differences and even disagreements. I shall also argue that these answers are substantially correct; at least they ought to be viewed by Christians as right. The lingering dissatisfaction many feel with their answers is, I shall argue, dissatisfaction with the epistemological limitations inherent in the human condition.

Plantinga on Belief in God: The Aquinas/Calvin Model

Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* is the culmination of a trilogy of books treating epistemological themes. *Warrant: The Current Debate* (1993) reviewed and criticized the leading contemporary accounts of *warrant* (Plantinga's term, it will be recalled, for that quality which, when added to true belief in sufficient quantity, makes such belief knowledge) and proposed Plantinga's own alternative account. In *Warrant and Proper Function* Plantinga developed his account of warrant in some detail and applied it to various types of knowledge. *Warranted Christian Belief* draws on this epistemological theory and develops an account of how a person might know Christian doctrines to be true.

The central thrust of the book is that Christian doctrines are not known to be true on the basis of *evidence*. Plantinga shares with the early great modern philosophers a commitment to foundationalism. That is, he thinks that not all of our beliefs can be based on other beliefs. Some of them are basic or foundational in character. He rejects the classical foundationalist claim, however, that only beliefs that are highly certain (self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses) can properly be basic. The classical foundationalist ideal is criticized both for being self-stultifying—since the claim that only highly certain beliefs should be properly basic is not itself highly certain, nor can it be shown to be probable on the basis of such highly certain beliefs—and for leading to the counterintuitive result that most of the things we think we know (such as what we ate for breakfast this morning) we do not in fact know.[15]

Plantinga therefore adopts a fallibilist version of foundationalism. Memory beliefs and perceptual beliefs are typical examples of properly basic beliefs; and they can have this status, even though they can be mistaken, because they often possess *warrant*. Roughly, beliefs possess warrant when they are the result of faculties that are functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth.[16]

On the basis of this epistemological framework, Plantinga centers his critical fire on what he terms the "evidentialist objection" to Christian belief. The evidentialist objection is that Christian belief, even if true, is unreasonable or unjustified because there is not enough evidence for its truth. Evidence here is understood as propositional evidence, the kind of evidence that could serve as a premise in an argument. Plantinga argues that the only version of this evidentialist objection that appears even initially plausible is one that specifies the defect in Christian belief as a lack of warrant. Basic

beliefs, however, do not gain warrant from other beliefs that serve as evidence for them. If Christian beliefs can be properly basic, then the evidentialist objection will fail.

In earlier work Plantinga defends the claim that belief in God can be properly basic in this way. There is, he thinks, a natural knowledge of God that does not depend on philosophical argument, appealing to no less than Thomas Aquinas, who says that "to know in a general and confused way that God exists is implanted in us by nature."[17] God has created us with a *sensus divinitatis* or sense of divinity that makes it possible for humans to know God's reality. John Calvin has of course developed this theme in some detail: "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. . . . God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty."[18] In *Warranted Christian Belief* Plantinga recapitulates his earlier account of how theistic belief can be properly basic and designates this account as the "Aquinas/Calvin model."

In claiming that belief on this Aquinas/Calvin model can be properly basic, Plantinga does not deny that there are circumstances and experiences that may be seen as grounding the belief. Thus, on beholding a sunset or a flower, a person may naturally think that God created this wonderful and beautiful thing. In such a case, however, the belief is still basic. The person does not treat the sunset or flower as evidence and attempt to construct an argument for God's existence, but simply spontaneously forms a belief in God as a result of the experience. This is possible according to the model because God has created humans with a natural tendency or disposition to form a belief in himself in these kinds of circumstances.

In calling this account a "model" Plantinga means several things. First, he wants to claim the model is possible, not merely logically possible but epistemically possible, "consistent with what we know."[19] Second, there are no objections to the model that are cogent; at least no objections that do not presuppose the falsity of Christian belief.[20] This means that any objections will have to take the form of a challenge to the truth of Christianity. A critic cannot argue that he or she does not know whether or not Christianity is true, but does know that Christian belief is irrational or unjustified. The only way a critic could know that such beliefs are unwarranted is to know that they are false. Third, Plantinga affirms, though he says he cannot philosophically show it to be the case, that the model he proposes is actually true or at least close to the truth.[21] Finally, he says that there are a number of similar models of how Christian beliefs could be known to be true, and that if Christianity is true, then one of those models is very likely to be true as

well.[22] His model, or a similar one, thus provides a good way for Christians to think about their faith and how it is known.

Returning to the Aquinas/Calvin model, Plantinga affirms that if the *sensus divinitatis* is a divinely implanted faculty designed to produce true beliefs, and if it is functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment so as to do that successfully, then a belief in God that is the output of this faculty possesses warrant. If these conditions are met and the belief is true and held with the requisite degree of firmness, then the belief in question will even amount to knowledge, Plantinga claims. Such a believer will know that God exists even if he or she does not know any arguments for God's existence, and has no propositional evidence for the belief.

Warranted Christian Belief: The Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model

Although Plantinga thinks that the *sensus divinitatis* can indeed lead to belief in God that is properly basic, the focus of *Warranted Christian Belief* is not on this faculty. This is for two reasons. First of all, Plantinga is interested not simply in whether theistic belief is warranted, but whether full-blooded Christian belief—belief in a Trinitarian God who has acted in Jesus to redeem the world—is warranted. For such beliefs a natural faculty that leads to belief in God is clearly inadequate. Secondly, Plantinga recognizes that the *sensus divinitatis* does not always, or even usually, function properly in the actual world, due to human sin. Human beings have rebelled against God, and this rebellion has damaged their natural epistemic powers, particularly with respect to the knowledge of God.

To deal with the damage due to sin and also the particularities of Christian belief, Plantinga develops what he terms the "extended Aquinas/Calvin model," which purports to give an account of how Christian beliefs could be known to be true by humans whose cognitive faculties have been damaged by sin. The model represents how God could communicate to humans his plan to repair the damage caused by human sin and give them the knowledge they need to receive the benefits of this plan.

Once more, John Calvin's views, particularly Calvin's doctrine of the internal testimony or witness of the Holy Spirit, play a dominant role in the development of Plantinga's extended model. Plantinga again claims that Calvin's account can be seen as an elaboration of views found in Thomas Aquinas, quoting the medieval thinker: "The believer has sufficient motive for believing, for he is moved by the authority of divine teaching confirmed by miracles and, what is more, *by the inward instigation of the divine invitation*."[23]

Almost all traditional Christians would agree that God's plan of salvation includes the life, atoning suffering and death, and resurrection of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. Through the work of Jesus, God has founded the Church, the new people of God, and invited humans to become part of this new community. On Plantinga's account, this plan of salvation has an epistemological dimension; God would not want to develop a scheme for human salvation and then leave humans ignorant of it. This epistemological dimension has three main constituents: Scripture, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, and faith as a reality in the believer[24] The Bible is viewed as "a library of books or writings each of which has a human author, but each of which is also specially inspired by God in such a way that he himself is its principal author."[25] Within its pages are found the "stunning good news of the way of salvation God has graciously offered."[26] The "great things of the Gospel" found therein are things that Christians come to "grasp, believe, accept, endorse, and rejoice in" by virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit in creating faith in their hearts, a work that over time repairs the damage done by sin.[27]

Plantinga uses the term "faith" not only for the third element in the model, but also as a useful shorthand designator of the whole process.[28] Thus, on the latter usage, one can say that Christian doctrines are known by faith and not by reason, if we think of reason as the natural faculty whereby we come to know some things by way of inference from other things we know. Plantinga is well aware that faith includes more than belief; he claims only that belief is a necessary part of faith.[29]

Plantinga makes the same claims for his extended model that he makes for the original model. It is possible (epistemically) that this is the means whereby God makes it possible to know Christian truths; there are no cogent objections, philosophical or otherwise, to the model that do not presuppose the falsity of Christianity. If Christianity is true, then the model, or something similar to the model, is very likely true as well, and thus the model provides Christians with a good way of thinking about their faith. If the model is indeed true, then Christians who believe the great things of the gospel are warranted in doing so, and if their degree of confidence is high enough, the warrant is sufficient for knowledge. Here Plantinga seems to follow Calvin and not Aquinas in holding that knowledge and faith are not completely distinct cognitive states; there is such a thing as a knowledge that is grounded in or made possible by faith.[30]

How is it possible for faith (using the term to refer to the whole process) to have warrant? The answer is simply that according to the model the standard conditions for warrant are met: the beliefs in question come into exis-

tence "by a belief-producing process that is functioning properly in an appropriate cognitive environment (the one for which they were designed), according to a design plan successfully aimed at the production of true beliefs."[31]

Plantinga does recognize one significant difference between the extended model and other cases of warranted belief. The extended model does not view the beliefs in question as produced by a natural human faculty, but by a cognitive process "that involves a special, supernatural activity on the part of the Holy Spirit."[32] Plantinga claims, however, that this makes no difference. The "deliverances" of this process can enjoy warrant, even "warrant sufficient for knowledge."[33]

Just as was the case for belief in God produced by the *sensus divinitatis*, the beliefs arrived at by faith can be warranted even though they are not based on evidence. Plantinga's externalism is most evident at this point. What matters is not that the believer has historical evidence for Jesus' miracles or the resurrection, but that the believer has convictions that are produced by a process aimed at truth and that is objectively likely to arrive at truth.

Why Plantinga Does Not Rely on an Evidential Case

Plantinga does not merely claim that Christian faith can be warranted even if it is not based on evidence. He claims that basing Christian beliefs on evidence is in some way mistaken or inappropriate. When we begin to examine his reasons for thinking this, some similarities to Kierkegaard's views on Christian belief begin to come into view.

Plantinga gives several reasons why the "elaborate scheme" of his model might be necessary for Christian belief rather than more ordinary belief-forming processes. First of all, because of sinfulness, humans have a "natural antipathy to the message of the gospel" that requires God to transform us before we can believe.[34] I interpret this as meaning that even if there were sufficient evidence for Christian faith, that evidence would not be sufficient to produce belief in fallen human beings. Plantinga's point here about a "natural antipathy" to the gospel seems close to Kierkegaard's view that authentic Christianity naturally tends to produce "offense" in the natural human being (PF 49–54).

Second, Plantinga points out that a mere change in beliefs is not sufficient for Christian conversion. Suppose, he says, that "someone *did* come to believe, just by way of historical investigation, that Jesus was indeed the divine son of God, that he died for our sins and rose again, and that through him we can have eternal life."[35] Such a change in beliefs alone would be

insufficient, because "coming to faith includes more than a change in opinion. It also (and crucially) includes a change of heart, a change in *affection*, in what one loves and hates, approves and disdains, seeks and avoids."[36] Plantinga argues that such a transformation of the personality could not be accomplished merely by a change in historical belief on the basis of historical evidence. Here his point seems reminiscent of Kierkegaard's claim that faith is a *passion*, and the characteristic Kierkegaardian argument that passions are not produced simply by reasons.[37]

Even if we admit the need for a divine transformation of the person's affections, could not the change in *beliefs* be accomplished by ordinary cognitive processes? Plantinga gives two reasons for doubting that this could happen, and both echo themes in Kierkegaard's thought.

First, he gives what might be called an egalitarian reason why God could not use ordinary cognitive means to change our beliefs. Plantinga claims, echoing something Aquinas says about the knowledge of God, that if faith were based on historical investigation "only a few people would acquire the knowledge in question, and they only after a great deal of effort and much time; furthermore their belief would be both uncertain and shot through with falsehood."[38] It is inconceivable that God might act so as to save the human race, and then limit the knowledge of those saving events to those with esoteric historical and linguistic knowledge. If God is interested in the salvation of the human race, then we may assume that any scheme of salvation is one that ordinary people could be able to come to know.

Here again Plantinga echoes a Kierkegaardian theme. Kierkegaard constantly argues that in the realm of moral and religious knowledge there is an essential equality.[39] If God became incarnate to save the human race, but the knowledge of the incarnation depended on historical learning, then there would indeed be gross inequality. If, for example, faith were dependent on accurate historical evidence, then those who had the opportunity to observe the saving events firsthand would have an advantage that Kierkegaard regards as intolerable: "Would the God allow the power of time to decide to whom he would be gracious, or would it not be worthy of the God to make the reconciliation equally difficult for every human being at every time and in every place" (PF 106).[40]

The more important reason, however, Plantinga gives for thinking that ordinary historical investigation will not do the job is simply that the evidence we have is insufficient. Most importantly, he suggests that the real problem is not that the evidence is less than we might like. The major difficulty is that what we are asked to believe is so amazing, so improbable, it is hard to imagine any historical evidence that would be sufficient:

> What is being taught, after all, is not something that chimes straightforwardly with our ordinary experience. It isn't like an account of an ancient war, or of the cruelty of the Athenians to the Melians, or of the overweening pride of some ancient despot. That sort of thing would be easy enough to believe. What we have instead, however, is the claim that a certain human being—Jesus of Nazareth—is also, astonishingly, the unique divine Son of God who has existed from eternity. Furthermore, this man died, which is not uncommon, but then three days later rose from the dead, which is uncommon indeed. Still further, it is by way of his atoning suffering and death and resurrection that we are justified, that our sins are forgiven, and that we may have life and have it more abundantly. *This* is heady stuff indeed, and the mere fact that some ancient authors believed it would certainly be insufficient for a sensible conviction on our part.[41]

The problem is really not that the historical evidence we have is of inferior quality, but that the beliefs in question are such that it is hard to see how any amount of historical evidence would be sufficient to warrant their acceptance.

Plantinga's language here is certainly not exactly that of Kierkegaard, who is of course well known for his claim that the incarnation is the Absolute Paradox. If, however, we put aside what I have argued is the erroneous interpretation of Kierkegaard that sees the paradox of the incarnation as a logical contradiction, we can see that what Kierkegaard means by this claim is quite close to Plantinga.[42] The incarnation is seen by Kierkegaard as the "most improbable" of events, the "strangest thing of all" (PF 52, 101). The content of faith is such that differences in the quality of the historical evidence make no difference. If the evidence were as complete and solid as possible, the evidence alone would still be insufficient for faith (92–93). And, assuming the opposite scenario for the state of the evidence, an individual who has only weak and scanty evidence is still not prevented by this from acquiring faith:

> If there were a contemporary [of the God's appearance in human form] who had lived in a foreign land and returned home just when that teacher [the incarnate God] had only a day or two to live, if in turn that contemporary was prevented by business affairs from getting to see that teacher and arrived only at the very end when he was about to give up his spirit, would this historical ignorance be an obstacle to his being able to be a follower if the moment was for him the decision of eternity? (PF 60)

The implied answer to this rhetorical question is "surely not."

Kierkegaard is well aware of the kinds of difficulties that inhere in historical testimony, and he is not concerned about minor contradictions in such testimony: "It is commonly recognized that the most honest and truthful

people are most likely to become entangled in contradictions when they are subjected to inquisitorial treatment and an inquisitor's fixed idea; whereas non-contradiction in one's lies is reserved only for the depraved criminal" (PF 92). In this case, however, the quality of the evidence is not really the problem. "Lawyers say that a capital crime absorbs all the lesser crimes—it is also that way with faith; its absurdity completely absorbs minor matters. Discrepancies, which would otherwise be disturbing, do not disturb here and do not matter" (104).[43]

Kierkegaard's Account of How Faith Becomes Present in the Individual

Kierkegaard's own account of how people can come to know that Jesus is the Son of God is in its major outlines quite similar to Plantinga's. On his view people certainly do not come to Christianity by reasoning from premises that make Christian beliefs certain or probable. Rather, such convictions are made possible by faith, and, like Plantinga, Kierkegaard sees faith as a gift, a condition that must be created in the individual by God. Compare the following two passages, the first from Plantinga: "Given our fallen nature and our natural antipathy to the message of the gospel, faith will have to be a *gift*, not in the way a glorious autumn day is a gift, but a special gift, one that wouldn't come to us in the ordinary run of things, one that requires supernatural and extraordinary activity on the part of God."[44] Kierkegaard agrees that faith, which he terms "the condition," is something a person must receive from God: "But that Teacher of whom we speak [the God] could not be known immediately, but only if he himself gave the condition. The person who received the condition received it from the Teacher himself, and consequently that Teacher must know everyone who knows him, and the individual can know the Teacher only by being himself known by the Teacher" (PF 68–69).

It is well known that Kierkegaard sees faith as a *passion*, a form of subjectivity or inwardness. How can such inwardness be related to the externalism we have seen as characteristic of Plantinga? The answer is quite simple. Faith is the form of subjectivity in which the individual is transformed so as to be able to recognize the presence of God in human form. Kierkegaard, like Plantinga, sees the Christian story as one which assumes that human beings are sinful, and sees that sin as blocking them from the truth which they need to know (PF 13–18). If humans are to grasp the truth, they must be transformed or re-created, and faith is the passion which effects this transformation. (Alternatively, one could say that faith is the state of the person

who has been transformed; both seem true since faith is an ongoing passion.) Faith as a form of subjectivity therefore has as one of its functions the enablement of a proper relationship to something outside the self, something "wholly other," namely God. Nor is this understanding of faith as "inwardness" all that different from Plantinga, who affirms that faith consists in part in a transformation of what he calls the affections.[45]

What role might historical evidence play in the acquisition of faith? Kierkegaard's answer is clear and concise. A historical contemporary can provide testimony that is the occasion for faith, but faith itself must be created in the individual by God:

> If someone wishes to state in the briefest possible way the relation of a contemporary to someone who comes later—without, however, sacrificing correctness for brevity—then one can say: *By means of* the contemporary's report (the occasion), the person who comes later believes through the power of the condition he himself receives from the God. (PF 104; emphasis in original)

Plantinga does not use the language of "occasion" with reference to historical testimony, though it is clear that he thinks the Holy Spirit does operate on the individual to produce faith as that individual is confronted with the claims of the gospel, including its historical claims. Remarkably, however, he does use the language of "occasion" several times with reference to religious experience. One construal of his view, which is also a way of construing Kierkegaard's view, is that faith is the result of religious experience occasioned by an encounter with the gospel. On this interpretation the "gift" of faith occurs when one has a direct encounter or awareness of God, perhaps when God reveals himself in Christ, and this experience is what makes faith reasonable. Though Kierkegaard does not explicitly use the language of religious experience or encounter, he does give this interpretation some support by his claim that faith must always be received in a firsthand way from God, and one might reasonably construe such a firsthand reception as requiring some kind of experiential encounter (PF 101–2).

Plantinga is not committed to thinking about things this way, but he claims that if some kind of religious experience is involved in the acquisition of faith, the experience still is not the basis of an argument for faith. Rather, "the experience is the *occasion* for the formation of the beliefs in question."[46] Similarly, an experience of "the glory and beauty" of some Christian teaching could be involved in coming to believe it, but again this perception "would be an *occasion* of the formation of the belief that the teaching is, indeed, from God (and is true), . . . The belief in question would be held in the basic way, although occasioned by the perception of something else."[47] Hence,

though God may use things such as experiences and historical testimony as occasions for the production of faith, he is himself always the chief author of faith, for both Kierkegaard and Plantinga.

Historical evidence is always insufficient for faith according to Kierkegaard, and although such testimony can be and normally is the occasion for God to create faith in the individual, it still does not function as evidence. Kierkegaard thus joins with Plantinga in decisively rejecting evidentialism. That does not mean that such faith does not have what Plantinga would call a ground. In *Practice in Christianity* Kierkegaard gives a clear answer to the question as to what motivates faith:

> "But if Christianity is something so fearful and horrible, how in the world can a person come to accept Christianity?" In an absolutely simple, and if you want that too, absolutely Lutheran way: only the consciousness of sin can, if I may dare say so, force (from the other side this force is grace) one into this horror. And in the same moment Christianity transforms itself and is sheer gentleness, grace, love, mercy. (PC 67)

Strikingly, Plantinga (directly) and Kierkegaard (indirectly, as we shall see) refer to David Hume's words about the ground of faith in an approving way:

> Upon the whole, we may conclude that the *Christian Religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. . . . Whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.[48]

Plantinga is aware that Hume may well be ironical or sarcastic here, but regardless of that Plantinga affirms that Hume is "partly right: belief in the main lines of the gospel is produced in Christians by a special work of the Holy Spirit."[49]

Kierkegaard does not mention Hume in the text of *Philosophical Fragments*, but he does borrow a line from Johann Georg Hamann, which was certainly inspired by Hume. Hamann (as paraphrased by Kierkegaard) says that "comedies and novels and lies must be probable," but not the foundational truths of Christianity, which are paradoxical and improbable (PF 52).[50] Hamann sees that Hume captures this thought (in the very quotation that Plantinga cites), and though, like Plantinga, Hamann knows that Hume may not be sincere, to him it does not matter since (again as paraphrased by Kierkegaard) "the truth in the mouth of a hypocrite is dearer to me than to hear it from an angel and an apostle" (52).

Differences Between Plantinga and Kierkegaard

I can imagine that some might object that the similarities I have emphasized mask some very significant differences between Plantinga and Kierkegaard. There are certainly differences, but I would argue that those differences are not in the end momentous. I will briefly discuss three such differences.

The first difference that comes to mind is the fact that Plantinga specifically attributes the production of faith to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Kierkegaard tends either not to discuss which persons of the Trinity are involved in the creation of faith or simply to refer to "the Teacher," the incarnate God, as the one who "gives the condition" (i.e., faith). This difference is real but not significant. We must remember that *Philosophical Fragments* is a pseudonymous book, and that the author, Johannes Climacus, at least portrays himself as a non-Christian. It would then not make literary sense for Kierkegaard to discuss theological details of the Christian story in this work. In any case it is hard to imagine that Kierkegaard would deny that the gift of faith is created through the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. And if anyone thinks this somehow contradicts the claim that faith is created by Christ, we must remember the unity of the persons of the Trinity, and that the Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Christ in the New Testament.

A second difference, which may be somewhat more important, is that Kierkegaard stresses the idea that faith is unreasonable, requires belief that is against the understanding, while Plantinga argues that there is nothing "irrational or contrary to reason" in believing the gospel.[51] I believe that this disagreement is more a semantic dispute than a real disagreement. I think Kierkegaard thinks that a belief is reasonable if it can be shown to be true, either deductively or probabilistically, by giving reasons. As we have seen, Christianity is not reasonable if this is what it means to be reasonable. On that definition of reasonable, however, Plantinga would say the same thing, as we have seen. The difference is that Plantinga challenges the classical foundationalist claim that it is only reasonable to accept beliefs that are highly certain or else can be shown by reason to be true based on beliefs that are highly certain.

One might put the difference this way. Plantinga and Kierkegaard agree that if one tries to base Christianity on propositional evidence it is unreasonable. They appear to disagree about whether the practice of requiring such evidence for all beliefs is reasonable. Even this disagreement, however, if it is substantive at all, must be qualified in two ways. First of all, as we have

noted, Plantinga agrees with Kierkegaard that there is a natural antipathy of human thinking to the gospel; Christianity poses what Kierkegaard calls "the possibility of offense." Second, we must remember that though Kierkegaard says that to believe one must "set reason aside," he also argues that it is reason itself that sees the need to set itself aside (when gripped by the passion of faith), and that when reason does this it is in some way fulfilled or completed; reason and the paradox can be on "good terms" with each other.[52] Offense is only a possibility for reason, not a necessity. Thus, in some sense he too recognizes that it is "reasonable" to believe against what "reason" (in the classical foundationalist sense) demands. Here Kierkegaard seems to me to be moving away from the classical foundationalist account of reason. I therefore conclude that this difference is also not very significant.

A third possible area of disagreement is that Plantinga clearly affirms that to be a Christian one must believe certain doctrines. Kierkegaard, however, (again assuming that his pseudonym Johannes Climacus reflects his thinking) affirms that the "object of faith is not the teaching but the Teacher," and that Christianity is not a matter of the affirmation of doctrines at all.[53] This certainly appears to be a major difference. We must recognize, however, that Kierkegaard uses the term "doctrine" in an unusual way. To the very passage in which he affirms that Christianity does not involve belief in doctrines, he attaches a footnote, in which he explains that there are two kinds of doctrines, and begs his reader not to misunderstand his claim that Christian faith is not in doctrines:

> Now, if only a quick head does not immediately explain to a reading public how foolish my whole book is, which is more than adequately seen in my alleging something like this: that Christianity is not a doctrine. Let us understand one another. Surely a philosophical theory that is to be comprehended and speculatively understood is one thing, and a doctrine that is supposed to be actualized in existence is something else. Christianity is a doctrine of this kind. (CUP 1:379n)

Kierkegaard goes on to explain in this same footnote that he has chosen to use the term "existence-communication" rather than doctrine, because in his age the term "doctrine" has come to mean a philosophical theory that has no real relation to life. If we mean by a "doctrine," a belief that is necessarily linked to existence, then Kierkegaard is willing to affirm that Christianity is itself a doctrine.

I think it is clear that Kierkegaard does think therefore that to be a Christian one must believe certain things. He simply does not think that those beliefs can be held in a detached, intellectual manner. They are the sort

of beliefs that must transform one's life if one truly holds them. But Plantinga says exactly the same thing about the "great things of the gospel." They are not beliefs meant to be merely intellectually contemplated, but must transform the affections and very existence of the believer. I conclude that this third apparent difference between Kierkegaard and Plantinga evaporates on closer inspection.

Justifying a Belief and Being Justified in Believing

Responses to Plantinga's new work on how Christian doctrines can be believed (and even known) have not been uniformly positive. Of course one would not expect non-Christian philosophers to agree that Christian doctrines can be known to be true as the result of faith that is produced by the work of the Spirit. Such critics will naturally point that this account presupposes the truth of Christianity, and therefore cannot serve as an argument or justification for it. However, this is hardly a criticism, since it is a point Plantinga himself insists on. He makes no attempt to argue for the truth of Christianity on premises that would be acceptable to non-Christians. So it is hardly surprising that this audience finds no such argument in his work; what is surprising is that this is taken by some as an objection.

There is a parallel here with Kierkegaard's treatment of offense. When Christianity is rightly presented, offense is a natural (though not inevitable) reaction on the part of non-Christians. The offended consciousness will proceed to denounce Christianity as "improbable." However, Kierkegaard says that faith calmly replies as follows: "It is just as you say, and the amazing thing is that you think that it is an objection" (PF 52). The objections of offense that Christianity is "irrational" are not really objections at all, but echoes of what Christianity itself proclaims. "Everything it [offense] says about the paradox it has learned from the paradox, even though, making use of an acoustical illusion, it maintains that it itself has discovered the paradox" (53).

Even if we agree, however, that the negative reaction on the part of non-Christians is not an objection to the accounts given by Plantinga and Kierkegaard, we might wonder why their accounts are also criticized by people of faith. Both thinkers are often stigmatized as fideists. What does such a charge amount to? What exactly is fideism?

I have previously argued that there are two importantly different forms of fideism, responsible fideism and fideism as irrationalism.[54] If fideism is the rejection of reason, I would argue that neither Plantinga nor Kierkegaard

is a fideist, though I grant that Kierkegaard's language sometimes makes it appear that he wishes to reject reason. (I will say more about this below.) Responsible fideism is the recognition that reason has limits, limits of various kinds. Some of the limits are due to our finitude or creatureliness; others are due to human sinfulness. Because of these limits we must recognize that some of our beliefs must be basic in character, not believed on the basis of reasons or propositional evidence, even though these beliefs are not self-evident or evident to the senses. If Christianity is true then some of the fundamental Christian beliefs are known to be true by faith in revelation. Some of these include beliefs that are above reason in the sense that reason cannot determine their truth. Some include beliefs that are against what we might call reason in the sociological sense; they go against what our society is likely to regard as "reasonable" since they are not probable on the basis of ordinary and general human experience. In this sense both Plantinga and Kierkegaard are surely fideists.

Both Kierkegaard and Plantinga offer an account of how Christian truth can be known that clearly presupposes the truth of Christianity. Such an account is of course useless as a positive apologetic argument. Construed as such an argument, the account would be blatantly circular. However, neither is seeking to provide such an apologetic argument, and thus the issue of circularity does not arise.

What is the value of an account of how one knows something that presupposes the truth of what one is supposed to know? Part of the value might be simply reflective; it is good not simply to know but to know how one knows something. There might be some apologetic value as well, of a negative sort. Someone in the grip of an evidentialist epistemology might be tempted to think that Christian belief is somehow defective, unjustified, or unwarranted if the person cannot produce arguments or evidence for its truth. Plantinga's account implies that this is a mistake, and that the fact that one cannot come up with good arguments for the truth of Christianity should not be regarded as a problem. Kierkegaard's treatment of offense is actually very similar. When confronted by offense, Kierkegaard thinks it is a great mistake to produce apologetic arguments. Such arguments actually create rather than alleviate doubt by giving the impression that faith is grounded in reasons.

Of course from the point of view of ambitious epistemology, such an account is unsatisfactory. The ambitious epistemologist wishes to give an account of how we know what we know that will silence the skeptic or objector, and this Plantinga and Kierkegaard manifestly refuse to do. However, from the point of view of externalist epistemology, this failure, if it is a failure, is not unusual. From the externalist point of view, whether or not

human beings have knowledge depends partly on how we are related to the external world. When we are rightly connected or linked to that world, through perception, memory, reason, and (if Christianity is true) faith, then we gain knowledge of that world.

The externalist recognizes, however, that we are not usually in a position to give a non-circular justification for what we might call our basic sources of knowledge. William Alston has argued convincingly that we cannot give a justification of reason, perception, or memory, for example, that does not presuppose the basic reliability of reason, perception, or memory.[55] We cannot check rational arguments without relying on reason. We cannot check perceptual and memory claims without using perception and memory. The circularity which inheres in attempts to justify basic sources of knowledge is, he argues, inherent in the human condition.

It is not surprising then that the same thing should be true in the case of faith. We might wish that it were not so, because we would like to be ambitious epistemologists. We would like to be able to justify our beliefs to all comers. We would like a philosophy that can serve as a foundational guarantee for faith; we want the epistemologist to issue us a certificate guaranteeing that our religious knowledge is genuine. This desire tempts us to think that we are ourselves only justified or warranted in believing what we can justify or show to be warranted to others. Alston argues that this is a mistake, and I think he is correct. It is possible that we are sometimes justified or warranted in believing what we do not know how to justify to others. Dissatisfaction with this fact is dissatisfaction with the human condition.

This is a general point, not restricted to religious knowledge, but it is applicable to religious beliefs and to Christian beliefs in particular. The philosopher of religion who wishes to be of service to Christianity may therefore have to accept a humbler task than that of providing a foundational guarantee. Such a philosopher may have to be content with clarifying the structure of human knowing so as to show that the circularity that attaches to accounts of Christian knowledge is not due to special pleading but is rooted in our situation as finite human beings. And Christianity will add to this claim that our sinfulness makes the task of a philosophical guarantee for religious knowledge even more quixotic. Because of our finitude we cannot know anything at all without faith in our human faculties. Because of sin we cannot know what we need to know about Christ without faith in God's revelation, a faith we cannot create in ourselves by ourselves.

PART FOUR

Kierkegaard on Ethics and Authority

Chapter 12

Faith as the *Telos* of Morality: A Reading of *Fear and Trembling*

Kierkegaard's reputation as a philosopher and theologian is not helped by the fact that what is likely his most commonly read book, *Fear and Trembling*, may also be his most mystifying and misunderstood work. It is chiefly because of *Fear and Trembling* that Brand Blanshard can claim that Kierkegaard is a "moral nihilist" whose views imply that our "clearest and surest judgments about values are worthless and it is no longer possible to hold that anything is really better than anything else."[1] To Blanshard, *Fear and Trembling* is an attempt to describe Abraham's action in being willing to sacrifice his son as an immoral yet praiseworthy act.

Kierkegaard's reputation as an irrationalist is based largely on two themes: the argument of the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* that faith may require acting in a way that is repugnant to morality and reason, and the argument of the pseudonym Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that Christian faith has as its intellectual content a paradox that is incomprehensible to reason. I have in other places argued that by "paradox" Climacus (and Kierkegaard) does not mean logical contradiction and that the opposition between faith and reason is not a necessary and intrinsic opposition but a tension rooted in the prideful pretensions of reason to autonomy and completeness.[2] In this essay I shall argue that *Fear and Trembling* does not support the judgment that Kierkegaard (or even his pseudonym) is an irrationalist in his understanding of the ethical life.

Doubtless, Kierkegaard himself would not have been too worried over whether philosophers characterize him as an irrationalist or immoralist; he seemed not to care very much about the opinions of philosophers. So one might think that defending him against such a charge is pointless, especially as any attempt to demystify *Fear and Trembling*—to attempt to make intelligible the conception of faith which it is the main point of the book to demarcate—will appear to be a repudiation of the book's main thesis. Johannes de Silentio affirms again and again that faith cannot be made intelligible and that faith is possible only "by virtue of the absurd" (FT 35). So it appears any attempt to clarify—or worse yet to defend—the notion of faith will appear to be yet another attempt to sell faith short, to paint the cheeks of theology to make her charms philosophically salable (32). Neverthe-less, it is clarification, and in some sense defense, of the notion of faith that is my aim, particularly with respect to its relation to ethics.[3]

The main point of *Fear and Trembling*, on my reading, is not that faith is opposed to morality, but that genuine religious faith cannot be *reduced* to a life of moral striving, or completely understood using only the categories of a rationalistic morality. It is the defense of this claim about the point of the book that requires me to clarify the concept of faith that the book embodies, and its relation to morality.

Two considerations embolden me in doing this. First, one hardly does Kierkegaard, who steadfastly denied he wanted any disciples and claimed that the purpose of his literature was to help his readers become individuals, justice by merely repeating his statements about "the absurd" in a sloganeering way, as is too often done by both friends and critics. Kierkegaardian concepts must be understood dialectically, in the context of the polemical situation in which Kierkegaard wrote.

Secondl, and more importantly, there is evidence in *Fear and Trembling* itself that a straightforward reading of the book is likely to be misleading. The author is the mysterious "Johannes de Silentio." The very motto of the book is *Was Tarquinius Superbus in Seinem Garten mit den Mohnköpfen sprach, verstand der Sohn, aber nicht der Bote* [What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not] (FT 3). Walter Lowrie informs us that this refers "to the well-known story of old Rome, which relates that when the son of Tarquinius Superbus had craftily gained the confidence of the people of Gabii he secretly sent a messenger to his father in Rome, asking what he should do next. The father, not willing to trust the messenger, took him into the field where, as he walked, he struck off with his cane the heads of the tallest pop-

pies. The son understood that he was to bring about the death of the most eminent men in the city and proceeded to do so."[4]

This motto hints that Johannes's message about faith is written in such a way that it is likely to be misunderstood by anyone who, lacking faith, is not "in the family." Inasmuch as Johannes himself repeatedly informs us that he lacks faith and cannot understand it, the motto suggests that Johannes himself as "the messenger" may not adequately grasp the significance of his own work. I shall argue that Johannes accurately understands what faith is not, but as he himself insists, does not understand what faith is.

The Ethical and the Religious in Other Kierkegaardian Texts

Before looking at the text of *Fear and Trembling* to see if it does indeed imply that faith and morality are contradictory, it is helpful to look first at other Kierkegaardian writings to see how the relation of morality to the religious life is conceived. If the message of *Fear and Trembling* is that the crucial defining characteristic of faith is the possibility that the person of faith may be required to act in a way that is contrary to moral duty, then the book is incompatible with the conception of faith that is developed in much of the remainder of Kierkegaard's writings. Although the distinction between the ethical and the religious is consistently maintained, and the latter is never reducible to the former, the former seems to be included within the latter as an essential element. Such relationships are hardly simple oppositions.

For example, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* affirms the essential connection between the religious and ethical spheres in many places. In reviewing *Stages on Life's Way*, Johannes Climacus notes that the relationship of the religious to the ethical is not analogous to the relationship of the ethical to the aesthetic[5]: "But in spite of this triple division the book is nevertheless an either-or. The ethical and the religious stages have in fact an essential relationship to one another" (CUP 1:294). Climacus expands on this point later and reemphasizes its importance:

> As for the religious, it is an essential requirement that it should have passed through the ethical. . . . If the religious is in truth the religious, if it has submitted itself to the discipline of the ethical and preserves it within itself, it cannot forget that religious pathos does not consist in singing and hymning and composing verses, but in existing. (1:388)

Existing for Climacus is of course equivalent to ethical striving.

If *Fear and Trembling* contains an attempt to describe religious faith as essentially obedience to arbitrary and unintelligible divine commands, then

the book is certainly not consistent with the views expressed about ethics in such nonpseudonymous works as *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself*, as well as *Christian Discourses*, *Works of Love*, and *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. For example, the absolutely ultimate character of morality is a favorite theme of *Christian Discourses*:

> For what is eternity? It is the distinction between right and wrong. Everything else is transitory: heaven and earth shall pass away; every other distinction is evanescent. . . . But the difference between right and wrong remains eternally. (CD 207–8)

In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard repudiates the idea that duties toward God could replace or compete with duties towards one's fellow humans:

> God is not a part of existence in such a way that he demands his share for himself; he demands everything, but as you bring it you immediately receive, if I may put it this way, an endorsement designating where it should be forwarded, for God demands nothing for himself, although he demands everything from you. (WL 159)

In *Practice in Christianity*, where Kierkegaard uses the pseudonym Anti-Climacus to describe Christian faith in decisively clear terms, the heart of Christian life is consistently described by such ethical terms as "ideality" and "perfection":

> Loving providence says . . . "Good for you. Now life's seriousness begins for you, now you have come so far out that you can take seriously the notion that to live is to be examined." For life's seriousness . . . consists in the *will* to be and to express perfection (ideality) in everyday reality, *willing* this in such a way that it may not turn out to one's own perdition, when once for all one busily cancels the whole thing, or presumptuously takes it in vain, regarding it as a dream—what lack of seriousness in both cases!—but humbly *wills* in reality. (PC 189–90; italics in original)

This same vision of ethical action as lying at the heart of the religious mode of existence pervades Kierkegaard's own retrospective view of his authorship: "And to honor every person, absolutely every person, is the truth, and this is what it is to fear God and love one's 'neighbor'" (PV 111). Even the applied ethical aspirations that shape the political sphere are linked to the religious life: "The religious is the transfigured rendering of that which the politician has thought of in his happiest moment, if he really loves what it is to be a human being, and loves people really" (103). It is unlikely, I think, that what the politician has dreamed of in his happiest moment is a state of society in which the individuals are constantly agonizing over the

possibility that God has required or may require of them to repudiate their moral conscience and commit the most dreadful acts imaginable.

The Relation of Kierkegaard to Johannes de Silentio

If the passages just examined are at all representative, then one cannot maintain that Kierkegaard's overall view was that religious faith and ethical life are fundamentally opposed. Of course this does not imply that *Fear and Trembling* does not contain such a message. Since the passages I have appealed to are all later than *Fear and Trembling*, it is possible Kierkegaard changed his mind on this subject after writing about the Abraham case. Alternatively, one might appeal to pseudonymity here: perhaps the view that ethics and religious faith conflict is an opinion of Johannes de Silentio which Kierkegaard did not share.

That there is divergence between Kierkegaard and Johannes de Silentio is certainly a possibility to be taken seriously. Johannes writes from his own perspective, avowedly that of a person who neither has faith nor understands it. It is because of this divergence of perspectives that I think it would be a mistake to look to *Fear and Trembling* for a positive account of the nature of faith. Some aspects of the life of faith are opaque to Johannes, and this may color and distort his understanding of the relation between faith and the ethical life.

The fact that Johannes de Silentio writes, however, from an "outsider's" perspective does not mean he does not accurately describe faith *as seen from that perspective*. Furthermore, that perspective is an illuminating one. By and large I think Johannes's understanding of what faith is *not* is on target, and it is for this reason that we can see the book as fulfilling an aim of Kierkegaard, the creator of Johannes. Ultimately, I do not think we have to accept a radical contradiction between the views of Johannes and Kierkegaard on the relation between the ethical and the religious because I do not think Johannes himself holds that the two are in fundamental opposition.

The Tension between Faith and the Ethical

The claim that there is no fundamental contradiction between the ethical and the religious life of faith for Johannes Silentio appears to be undermined by numerous passages. Johannes says that if Abraham's action is considered from a purely ethical perspective it must be condemned: "The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he intended to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he intended to sacrifice Isaac" (FT 30).

Johannes seems constantly to be contrasting the ethical life and the life of faith:

- The ethical is the universal; faith is the paradox that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal (FT 54).
- The ethical is the rationally intelligible; faith cannot be intellectually mediated because it involves a paradox (PT 56).
- The ethical sees all duties as duties to God but sees no duties as duties to God in any special, direct sense; faith perceives an absolute duty towards God that reduces all ethical duties to relative duties (FT 68–69, 81).
- The ethical is the publicly communicable; faith is concealed even when it expresses itself in speech (FT 82, 112–19).

Such passages seem to contradict the harmonious view of the relation between the ethical and the religious we have seen in other Kierkegaardian writings.

These contrasts, however, do not settle the matter. On the view of the relation between the ethical and the religious that I see in Kierkegaard, there is present in his texts more than one sense of "the ethical." The ethical life is sometimes seen as a "stage on life's way" that is prior to the religious life and, when it is claimed to be absolute and final, is opposed to the religious life. This same ethical life, however, when purged of its absoluteness and finality, reappears as an essential component of the religious life. A tension between the religious and ethical may therefore not be inevitable and final; it may rather result from certain claims made on behalf of the ethical, claims that are not essential to the ethical life itself. The tension between religious faith and the ethical in *Fear and Trembling* is between faith and a form of the ethical life that claims to swallow up faith.

The main target, I believe, is a view of the religious life that interprets faith as reducible to a life of moral striving. The classic paradigm for this tendency is Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, but Kant can be taken as representative of a host of nineteenth-century theologians and philosophers who regard the religious life as an attempt to realize certain moral ideals that are accessible to human reason.[6] Such a view of the religious life was and is attractive to many because it requires no transcendent or supernatural revelation. Even Hegel's philosophy of religion can be seen as a sophisticated attempt to understand religion as rational in this way, as a type of what Kierkegaard called "immanent" religiousness.

In order to show that the religious life is not reducible to moral striving, Johannes de Silentio highlights the ways in which a transcendent religious faith cannot be captured by the categories of a rational morality. An "ethics" that views itself as complete and autonomous will come into conflict with this kind of religiousness—hence the tension between faith and the ethical in *Fear and Trembling*.

The Specific Character of the Ethical in *Fear and Trembling*

To support the above claims, the specific character of the ethical as seen in *Fear and Trembling* must be examined. I now think the conception of the ethical operative in the book is mainly Hegelian in character. One might think (as I once did) that Kant is the operative figure; certainly the language Johannes uses to describe the ethical is Kantian: "The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which from another perspective can be expressed like this: it applies at all times" (FT 54). However, one must recall that Hegel often uses such Kantian language as well, and when one examines how the concept of the ethical functions in *Fear and Trembling*, Hegelian themes play a heavy role.

For example, in *Problema I* Johannes contrasts the ethical with the religious by contrasting the tragic hero, an ethical figure, with the person of faith. Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, Brutus's heroic condemnation of his son, and Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter are all different from Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac because the actions of Agamemnon, Brutus, and Jephthah are all ethically defensible. All three of these cases involve a conflict between one's duties as a parent and one's duties as a citizen. Johannes seems to think it would be moral for a parent to sacrifice a child for the sake of some great national goal. (Our judgment that some of these actions are in fact morally dubious shows how thoroughly historical and social Johannes's concept of the ethical is.) Abraham's action, on the other hand, cannot be ethically justified: "It is not to save a people, not to support the idea of the state that Abraham does it" (FT 59). Abraham's action cannot be ethically justified because he is not a citizen of the state; the family is the highest social institution in which he participates and therefore there can be no higher ethical values than family values: "There is no higher expression for the ethical in Abraham's life than this: the father shall love the son" (59).

The ethical life that is in tension with the life of faith is not a life that revolves around some eternally valid moral laws, knowable by a timeless ahistorical reason, as Kant and perhaps Blanshard might think; it is an ethical life that sees the highest life as one that is devoted to the furtherance of social

institutions and socially sanctioned values. Furthermore, this life is conceived, in Hegelian fashion, as in some sense absolute or final: "It [the ethical] rests immanent in itself, has nothing outside itself that is its *telos* [end, purpose] but is itself the *telos* for everything outside itself, and when the ethical has taken this into itself, it goes no further" (FT 54). This ethical life sees itself in religious terms as providing salvation.

To summarize, the ethical life that is in tension with faith in *Fear and Trembling* is historical in at least two ways: (1) It understands our specific duties as those that are embodied in social institutions and shared social values; and (2) It understands the ethical life, so conceived, as the final word on how human life is to be lived, as providing the ultimate and final means of obtaining "salvation." To say that the life of faith must come into conflict with the ethical life conceived in this way by no means implies that the religious life must contradict the ethical life understood in other ways.

Furthermore, there is evidence that Johannes de Silentio himself understands the limitations of the ethical life as he contrasts it with the religious life. First, it must be noted that Johannes says that the "irrational" or "absurd" aspect of Abraham's faith is not his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, but rather Abraham's ability to receive Isaac back joyfully after having been willing to sacrifice him. Johannes contrasts Abraham understood as a "knight of faith," with another type of hero, a "knight of infinite resignation." If Abraham had been a knight of infinite resignation, he would have been willing to sacrifice Isaac, but he would not have believed that Isaac would be restored to him (FT 35–37). Resignation gives up the finite and the temporal for the sake of the infinite and the eternal. Faith does the same, but somehow, as a result of a "double movement," receives the finite and the temporal back again (36).

Infinite resignation as described by Johannes has several interesting features. First of all, it is the viewpoint of Johannes himself (FT 34–35). If asked by God, Johannes would have no trouble sacrificing Isaac; such a sacrifice requires only "a purely philosophical move" that Johannes says he is able to make when required (48). Resignation is fully rational, requires no leap of faith by virtue of the absurd. Yet resignation is already in some sense "higher" than the ethical view of life that is in tension with faith. Resignation involves the discovery that not everything in life can be understood using the categories of a rational, social ethic; it is rooted in the discovery of an "incommensurability" in the life of the individual (34, 51).

The implication of this is that even though Johannes de Silentio may not understand faith, he does understand that the ethical view of life that is at war with faith is not the final word on life; he himself sees this and does

not think any special religious revelation is required to do so. To think that the ethical life in this sense has limits is not absurd, but is something that can be thought "philosophically." What seems absurd to Johannes is not that Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac but that he can be willing to do this and yet "once again to be happy with Isaac" (FT 35).[7]

Johannes de Silentio may not understand faith, and therefore may not understand the role of ethics within faith. But he understands that what he terms "the ethical life" is not the "highest" view of life, and therefore can understand and even believe that the life of faith he does not understand may be higher than the ethical life, since faith appears to him to be even higher than the life of infinite resignation, which already has seen the limitations of the ethical.

Why the Ethical Life Is Not the Highest

What are the limitations of the ethical life, the limitations recognized by both infinite resignation and faith? These limits are more assumed than articulated in *Fear and Trembling*, but they do surface at certain key points. Just raising this question helps us get clear on the true theme of *Fear and Trembling*, which is not, I think, whether God might require a person to kill his or her child, but how an individual becomes a self in the truest and deepest sense of the word, how a person achieves "salvation."

The ethical answer to the question of salvation is that one becomes a self by willing the good. The good here refers to those values that are socially shared and sanctioned, the good that I absorb in being socialized and which I can articulate and defend publicly because of its social character. It is assumed that one understands the good and has the power to will it. *Ought* implies *can* and since I ought to become a self, I must believe that I am able to do so. The religious life begins with the discovery that this tidy, rational assumption is contradicted by experience; it begins with the discovery that actual existence is "incommensurable" with the demands of ethics.

This idea that there is something incommensurable with the ethical view of life surfaces most clearly in *Fear and Trembling* in the context of a discussion of certain individuals who are in some way already existing outside the boundaries of ethical existence, particularly Shakespeare's Gloucester from *Richard III*, the story of Sarah from the book of Tobit, and the character of the Merman from the legend of Agnes and the Merman. Here it becomes even clearer that the concept of the ethical that underlies Johannes de Silentio's discussion is Hegelian: "Natures such as Gloucester's cannot be saved by mediating them into an idea of society. Ethics actually only makes a

fool of them" (FT 106). Rather, people like Gloucester have natures "basically in the paradox" (106).

A person who has by guilt "gone outside the universal, . . . can return only by virtue of having come as the single individual into an absolute relation to the absolute" (FT 98). This of course is the formula for the kind of faith that Abraham possesses, the faith of someone whose identity is not exhausted by the ideals society sanctions, but whose self is grounded in a reality that transcends society. So it seems that for some people, the possibility that ethics is not the final word is very important, for if ethics is the final word, then their lives are hopeless. This is why Johannes says that if Abraham had heroically (and ethically) chosen to take his own life instead of Isaac's, he would have been admired; "but it is one thing to be admired and something else to become a guiding star who saves the anguished" (21).

For some people at least, the ethical view of life seems to founder on the discovery that they are incapable of fulfilling their social roles in the prescribed manner. When Johannes finally gets around to discussing this point, he signals its importance with a "wake-up message" for the reader: "Here I will now make a remark by which more is said than was said at any point previously" (FT 98). The ethical view of life comes to grief on sin; sin is a "higher immediacy" that places the individual outside the confines of a rational ethic, if that ethic is taken as the final word on the goal of human life: "An ethic that ignores sin is a completely fruitless discipline, but if it affirms sin, then it has *eo ipso* transcended itself" (98–99). To make the point absolutely clear, Johannes reiterates it in a footnote: "As soon as sin appears, ethics founders, precisely on repentance; for repentance is the highest ethical expression, but precisely as such the deepest ethical self-contradiction" (98n).

Abraham's action as a person of faith is not understandable in purely ethical terms, Johanne insists, but the significance of that fact emerges only when we ask who are the anguished people for whom Abraham is the "guiding star." The anguished are those who are already "outside" the universal, those for whom socialization has not produced authentic selfhood. For these people, it is crucially important that the ethical life-view not be the final word on the possibilities for authentic selfhood.

The Limits of Johannes de Silentio's Perspective

We have seen the importance of Johannes de Silentio's argument that faith is not reducible to a life of ethical striving. We can now appreciate as well some of the shortcomings in the perspective of Johannes on what faith is.

Johannes has grasped the significance of the irreducibility of faith to ethics for those outside the pale, so to speak, but he then spoils this insight by seeing these individuals only as exceptional characters. Johannes sees that there is an analogy between the faith of Abraham and the faith that might be the salvation of people like Gloucester. This analogy makes it possible for Abraham's story to provide hope to such people. He thinks, however, there is a *disanalogy* also. What is said about the Merman and about Gloucester does not explain Abraham, because Abraham was not one of the anguished souls, not a sinner. Abraham "was a righteous man" (FT 99), one who can be understood by "immediate categories" (98n). Only when the exceptional individuals have been brought to the point where they can achieve their social identity by "accomplishing the universal" will their cases be completely analogous to Abraham's (99).

What Johannes does not see here is that the case of the "exception" is not an exception. No one becomes an authentic self simply by absorbing the values of one's society. Authentic selfhood requires everyone to become "the single individual." The situation of being "outside the universal," of finding something in life incommensurable with the life-view of a rational, social ethic is one that everyone who is truly honest will find herself in. It is not surprising that Johannes fails to see that, since it is an insight that depends on a Christian understanding of sin.

Johannes says that a book dealing with Abraham will not deal with sin because Abraham is a righteous man; Abraham is sinless (FT 99). Whether Johannes understands it or not, this statement has an ironic ring. From Kierkegaard's own perspective no individual, not even Abraham, can truly "accomplish the universal." This truth is apparently not clear to Johannes, who can conceive of the incommensurable only as a problem for an exceptional individual. We are told in *The Concept of Anxiety* that sin cannot be scientifically understood, and must be grasped through a dogmatic theology grounded in revelation (16–20).

The pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis, because of his understanding of sin, has quite a different perspective on the significance of *Fear and Trembling* itself: "Either the whole of existence [*Tilværelsen*] ends in the demand of ethics, or the condition is provided and the whole of life and of existence begins from this point, not through an immanent continuity with the former existence, which is a contradiction, but through a transcendence" (CA 17n). The choice is between an ethical view of life that claims to have the final word on human existence, and a view that recognizes that all of us, not merely the exceptional people

Johannes considers, are in need of "a condition in which the whole of life and existence" can begin anew.

Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *Postscript*, makes a similar point, applying it specifically to the notion of the "teleological suspension of the ethical":

> The teleological suspension of the ethical must be given a more distinctively religious expression. The ethical will then be present every moment with its infinite requirement, but the individual is not capable of realizing this requirement. . . . The suspension in question consists in the individual's finding himself in a state precisely the opposite of that which the ethical requires. (CUP 1:266)

Without the consciousness of sin, Climacus says, the suspension from the ethical will be "a transitory phase which again vanishes, or remains outside life as something altogether irregular" (CUP 1:267). This is a precise description of Johannes's treatment in *Fear and Trembling* of Abraham's trial of faith. To really understand the positive character of the religious life, including of course faith, one must understand sin, but Climacus says that no pseudonymous book prior to *The Concept of Anxiety* manifested such an understanding (268). *Fear and Trembling* only "used sin incidentally" (268).

From this it follows that it is a mistake to take *Fear and Trembling* as giving us a positive account of faith. *Fear and Trembling* shows us that Kant and others who wanted to understand faith in purely ethical terms were mistaken, at least if they wished to talk about the faith of Abraham, the "father of faith." The "truth" of Johannes de Silentio's portrayal consists in the fact that he sees that a person of faith is a person who has a direct and personal relationship with God, a relation that cannot be reduced to the individual's absorbance of socially accepted ideals. The distortion in Johnannes's account consists in the fact that the suspension of the ethical is conceived as a suspension of particular ethical duties. When sin is brought into the picture, it is recognized that what must be suspended is the ethical as a total self-sufficient view of life and mode of existence. The suspension occurs, not because of divine fiat, but because of human freedom. Johannes sees that the guilty individual who has "come outside the universal" can only return "by virtue of having come as the single individual into an absolute relation to the absolute" (FT 98). What he does not see is that this is the situation of every human being.

When this is seen, the significance of the Abraham story remains. Johannes's account of Abraham is a poetic anticipation of the situation of the Christian believer. Since it is poetry, one should not look to the story for

detailed information about the character of Christian existence. In particular, one should not look to the story to develop a Christian ethic by answering such questions as whether God could or would command a person to sacrifice a child. Such questions are important and need to be addressed, but they are not the questions Johannes helps us to answer. What he wants us to see is that it is at least possible for God to encounter a person directly, not simply through social ideals, and that such an encounter can provide a new self, a new identity, and a new understanding of the purpose of human existence.

Is Faith Still Absurd?

To return to an objection to my argument raised at the beginning, it might appear that I have succeeded too well at making faith understandable. In arguing that *Fear and Trembling* should not be taken as giving Kierkegaard's positive perspective on the relation between faith and the ethical, have I not robbed faith of its distinctiveness? Does faith remain in any sense absurd, or something that is achieved "by virtue of the absurd?"

An effective answer to this question is provided by Kierkegaard himself, in an unpublished reply to "Theophilus Nicolaus." Under the Nicolaus pseudonym, a theologian named Magnus Eiriksson had attacked Kierkegaard along much of the same lines as Blanshard, accusing him of developing a view of faith that puts faith in fundamental opposition to reason.[8] In response, Kierkegaard insisted that the object of faith is "the absurd" but at the same time maintain that "When the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd—faith transforms it" (JP 1:10). This is consistent when we recognize the social, historically conditioned character of "reason" and "the ethical" in Kierkegaard's treatment. Insofar as God transcends the social order, and insofar as the social order attempts to deify itself and usurp divine authority, there is a necessary opposition between faith and reason, just as there is a tension between faith and what in *Fear and Trembling* is called the ethical.

So the believer understands and must not forget that in faith he is committed to something that cannot be defended by appeal to values and modes of thinking enshrined in the social order. He is indeed called to a lonely journey to Mt. Moriah. Yet the believer does not see the journey as absurd, for he has faith. From the perspective of faith, the relativity and historical character of reason and the ethical become clear, and new ways of thinking and acting open up, which may be judged by society as "irrational" and "unethical" but may be seen by the "single individual" as fulfilling in a more authentic way the ideals that society itself claims to support.

The Ethic of Faith

I have argued that the life of faith is in tension with the ethical as a totalized life-view, but that the ideals of the ethical life are taken up into the life of faith, albeit in a transformed manner. What then does the ethical look like in the context of the life of faith? Johannes de Silentio himself argues that the life of faith may outwardly appear to be the same as a conventional ethical life. The knight of faith may look "just like a tax collector" (FT 39). Though the identity of the person of faith lies in his or her personal relation to God, that identity does not have to lead to repudiation of accepted social norms. Since those norms have been relativized, the possibility remains that a conflict may emerge; whether that possibility will become actual depends on the nature of the society in question. It seems very likely to me that the situation of someone who grows up in a small religious community—such as the Amish—might differ greatly from that of someone who grows up in a racist or militaristic society.

In any case it seems clear that the life of faith is not a life that repudiates ethical existence, but rather substitutes a new conception of the ethical for that which underlies prevailing social ethics. The new conception differs from the old one in two fundamental ways: (1) the basis of the ethic is not the collective judgments of society but the transcendent message of God; (2) the ethic does not merely prescribe ideals but concerns itself with the concrete conditions that make it possible to realize its ideals.

Both these elements are implicit in Vigilius Haufniensis's sketch of a "new science" (CA 20) "that, in contrast to that science called ideal *stricte* [in the strict sense], namely, ethics, proceeds from actuality" (19). This "new science begins with dogmatics," and within it "ethics again finds its place as the science that has the dogmatic consciousness of actuality as a task for actuality" (20). The new ethic is to be an ethic based on dogmatics, hence on a transcendent revelation from God, and it is to take seriously the actual situation of human beings in considering how the ideals of ethics are to penetrate their lives (17n). I believe this new ethic is worked out by Kierkegaard in some detail in *Works of Love*.

Of course for Christians the definitive message from God that is to provide a basis for life is not a command to Abraham, but the life of Jesus Christ. The ethical content of faith is a product of this relationship. The person of faith is the person who has encountered God in Jesus Christ and whose life has been transformed by that encounter. This relationship has as its object the paradox of God as a human, and it requires the believer to

become a "contemporary" of Jesus through a life of following or imitating Christ (PF 59–71; PC 231–50).

In the course of Kierkegaard's authorship a shift can be seen in his understanding of what this demands.[9] In *Fear and Trembling* the person of faith can be indistinguishable from the tax collector. In *Practice in Christianity*, however, the person of faith sees the dangers of admiration (and we must note that Johannes de Silentio is an admirer of Abraham) and understands that being a follower will bring one into opposition with the world. The world is not so godly that the true follower of God can blend indistinguishably into its values.

Even in *Practice in Christianity* the life of the follower is describable in ethical terms. Following Christ brings conflict with society, but it is not a simple repudiation of the values society professes to uphold but an embracement of whatever truth those values embody. Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author, is not afraid to say that the imitation of Christ is true morality and that the ideals discovered therein are universally valid human ideals (PC 235, 238). The ground of his attack on Christendom is partly that Christendom is dishonest: it does not in actuality realize the ideals it claims to recognize.

So although the new ethic of faith is not reducible to a life of moral striving since it is made possible by a concrete relationship to a historical person, it most emphatically includes moral content. This moral content differs from the moral content of the old ethics partly by taking those old ethical ideals with real seriousness and earnestness, partly by taking seriously the actual situation of human beings and the task of realizing those ideals. It is, however, morality in a new key, for its motivational propeller is not autonomous striving to realize one's own ideals, but grateful expression of a self that has been received as a gift. Kierkegaard describes this business of imitation thus: "Although it is the utmost strenuousness, imitation should be like a jest, a childlike act—if it is to mean something in earnest, that is, be of any value before God—the Atonement is the earnestness" (JP 2:1909).

Chapter 13

A Kierkegaardian View of the Foundations of Morality

Most Christians believe that morality and religious belief are linked in various ways. One of those ways concerns what may be called the foundation of morality. Many Christian thinkers, and most ordinary Christian believers as well, think that in some way God is the basis of the moral order. There are various things that might be meant by this, but I have in mind issues that are primarily metaphysical. That is, the question concerns why there is such a thing as moral obligation at all, or why particular moral obligations hold, as opposed to questions about how we might come to know about those obligations, or questions about what motivates people to be moral. Of course interesting epistemological consequences may be implied by the metaphysical questions, but I do not propose to address them here.

Before going further, I want to note that in this essay, although I shall talk mainly about moral obligations, this should not be taken as implying that morality is reducible to obligations or as implying any negative judgment about theories of virtue or other approaches to moral theory. It does imply that there are such things as being obligated to perform or to refrain from performing acts on specific occasions. Therefore, I shall treat the claim that God provides the foundation for morality as equivalent to the claim that it is because of God that there are such things as moral obligations, or that it is because of God that there are particular moral obligations.

It could be argued that God is not the basis of morality on the grounds that propositions expressing moral obligations and other kinds of moral truths are necessary truths, and that no explanation of why such truths hold

is needed or can be given. For example, Richard Swinburne has claimed that "the basic moral principles are analytic," as part of a discussion that concludes that prospects for a moral argument for theism from the truth of statements of moral obligation are not bright.[1] Even if this were so, God could still in some sense provide a foundation for moral obligation. Even if propositions like "truth-telling is a duty" were analytic (which I doubt very much), it would not follow that the proposition, "Evans has a duty to tell the truth to the police about what he saw on March 23" is analytic. The latter proposition can hardly be a necessary truth of any kind, since the existence of Evans is not a necessary truth. If God created Evans and the other conditions which make the proposition true, then in a perfectly straightforward sense God is the foundation of the obligation. Swinburne's view can be read then as implying that God grounds morality by creation of a particular kind of world. If one has reasons to believe that God is the creator of the world, including those features which ground specific moral obligations, then one has reason to believe God is the ground of those obligations. However, the moral obligations themselves do not provide any additional reason to believe in God. So on my reading, Swinburne's argument is an attack on some moral arguments for theism, but not necessarily an attack on the claim that God provides the metaphysical basis of morality. Swinburne's view here is a helpful reminder that making sense of the way God might provide a foundation for morality does not automatically lead to a convincing moral argument for theism.

Still, even if most Christians are agreed that God does provide a basis for morality, there is hardly agreement about how this is supposed to happen. There is an apparent difference between theories such as Swinburne's—in which God might be said to provide the foundation of morality by creating persons with certain kinds of qualities and an environment for those persons with particular qualities—and some types of divine-command theories, in which God creates moral obligations simply by making certain demands on his creatures. The former type of theory might be called "naturalistic" since morality is on such a view grounded in nonmoral natural features of the world; the latter could be called "supernaturalistic" since it seems to ground morality directly in an act of God, not merely indirectly through God's general creative activity.

Despite the apparent differences, it would be rash to claim that these two types of accounts of how God grounds morality are necessarily incompatible. Certainly some naturalistic theories are incompatible with some supernaturalistic theories. However, there are many different versions of the naturalistic type of theory, and quite a few of the supernaturalistic type of

theory as well. In the remainder of this essay, I wish to try to sketch a theory that will incorporate some of the features of both types. I will begin by examining a version of each type of theory and showing how some of the elements of its apparent rival can be generated from it. I will then, drawing on some ideas of Kierkegaard, try to describe a coherent account that preserves the virtues of both naturalism and supernaturalism. It should be noted that Kierkegaard discusses ethical issues in a bewildering variety of contexts; he sometimes talks about "the ethical" as a rival to the religious life, sometimes as a preliminary to it, and sometimes as an element within it. There is therefore more than one ethical view that could be derived from Kierkegaard's writings. I believe the view that I shall develop in this essay is close to Kierkegaard's own, but anyone who doubts this should simply regard this proposal as "Kierkegaardian" in the sense that it is suggested by ideas in some of Kierkegaard's writings.

Human Nature Theories

One of the most plausible naturalistic theories is one that emphasizes the relationship between morality and human nature. Aristotle developed an account of morality in which morality is linked to the actualization of certain potential qualities inherent in human nature. To be happy and generally to flourish, human beings must seek to develop those qualities that are distinctive of their nature; certain ways of acting and certain kinds of social arrangements foster this actualization of our humanness and are good. Obligations are linked to the achievement of such goods. Ethical theories that follow Aristotle in a broad sense in this way I shall term "human-nature" theories.

Of course Aristotle was not a Christian thinker, and some would see this type of human nature moral theory as an alternative to a religiously based ethic. Nevertheless, I believe that Thomas Aquinas and those who have followed him in developing Christian versions of this Aristotelian approach have been wise in seeing possibilities for synthesis. Evidence that Christianity and human nature theories have a natural fit may be found in noting how widely and quickly belief in anything like a common human nature has ebbed with the decline of Christian faith among European intellectuals.

Christian versions of this human nature theory must of course see our human nature as grounded in God's creative intentions. In creating human beings God gave them a particular nature, with a distinctive set of potentialities, because he willed them to become particular kinds of creatures. So human nature theories by no means ignore the divine will. Nevertheless, on

the surface ethical truths here seem to depend directly on facts about human nature rather than on divine commands.

There are resources, however, within a human nature theory to justify taking divine commands as ethical duties. One of the features of human beings that will be emphasized in any plausible version of a human nature theory will be the relational character of human beings. Human beings were not created as or intended to be solitary individuals. They can only flourish and achieve happiness by having relationships to others. Furthermore, it is fully consistent with human nature theories to hold that some kinds of relationships are more consistent with our nature than others in that they tend to be fulfilling and productive of human happiness and flourishing. Thus, one might argue that families, or at least some kinds of families, are social arrangements that embody such relationships. Other things being equal, human life is better when it is lived in a good family. Human beings are generally happier when they have a good relationship with loving parents and grandparents and other relatives, and when they themselves have the opportunity to become parents and grandparents, and enjoy close relations with other relatives.

Social relationships of this type carry with them ethical obligations. People who become parents have an obligation to nourish and care for their children. Most people will agree that children also have obligations to respect and show gratitude to parents who have cared for them in this way. So it seems that an ethical theory that links morality with human happiness and a specific human nature can also very naturally link morality with certain kinds of social relationships and the roles those relationships carry with them. Christians will of course interpret these social relationships as part of God's intentions in creation; thus most Christians have interpreted the family as a divinely ordained institution, although they have often disagreed over just what form this institution should take.

Now Christianity teaches that God is personal and that genuine social relationships with God are possible. Furthermore, Christians have traditionally held that such a relationship is good; in fact, they have held that it is the highest possible good, lacking which a human being cannot be truly happy. It follows very plausibly from this that a need for such a relationship is a constituent of human nature. To quote Augustine, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[2] So among the social relationships that must be present if humans are to flourish, we must number the relationship of Creator to human creature.

This relationship, like other social relationships, would appear to carry with it specific types of moral duties. Children owe loving parents respect

and gratitude, and, at least while they are young and being supported by their parents, obedience (at least to commands that are not immoral). (This is of course consistent with saying that loving parents will want their children to have a gradually increasing degree of autonomy and thus make many decisions for themselves.) Analogously, it is plausible that creatures who owe their very existence to a being whom they understand to be a just and loving Creator owe their Creator respect and gratitude of a particular sort, as well as a duty to obey any commands the Creator might make upon them. (This also is compatible with assuming that the Creator might want them to make many decisions on their own, including the decision as to whether freely to comply with his commands.)

These commands might include commands directing humans to live in ways that lead to their flourishing by living in accord with their nature. It would not be surprising that God would make such commands since his intentions are already embedded in that human nature. In this case, many moral rules might have a double justification. One should follow them because they are conducive of goods, since they contribute to human happiness in various ways. However, they also are divine commands, and thus obeying them is a duty one owes to God as Creator. Obeying God's commands is essential to a relationship that is itself essential to the achievement of a truly good life.

God's commands should not be seen merely as "reinforcing" things that would be good to do anyway. I see no reason why God's commands would necessarily be limited to commands that reinforce those items that it would be reasonable to perform given our human nature. God might very well command humans to live in certain ways rather than others even when there is no intrinsic link between those ways commanded and our happiness, though of course there would be such a link as a result of the command. Perhaps, for example, God might command certain things as a test of our loyalty and devotion.

Of course ultimately our duty to obey God also relates to human happiness; the relationship to God is itself one that leads to human flourishing inasmuch as God has created us to enjoy this relationship. Nevertheless, this link between the divine commands and happiness by no means entails that one's specific motive in obeying God is to further one's own happiness. A child may realize that respect and obedience to parents contribute in the long run to happiness, but nevertheless particular acts of obedience may still be motivated by respect and obedience for the parents. My conclusion is that a naturalistic theory of a human nature type may quite consistently hold not only that all moral duties are divine commands, but also that for many of

our moral duties, one of the reasons they are our duties is that God has commanded them. Furthermore, it is even possible for a Christian human nature theorist to hold that some duties are moral duties solely because God has commanded us to perform those actions or develop certain institutions.

Divine-Command Theories

Having attempted to show that a naturalistic theory of a human nature type can include an important place for divine commands as part of morality, I shall now try to work for rapprochement from the other side of the fence. I want to show that a supernaturalistic divine-command ethical theory can accommodate many of the concerns and emphases of a naturalistic human nature theory. My concern here is not to argue for a divine-command theory, but merely to show that someone who does find such a view appealing may have good reasons to relate moral obligations to human nature.

I shall here assume that an "obligation" is a special kind of moral quality, not equivalent to "being good to do" or "being productive of goodness." Let me illustrate what I hold is true for moral obligations by first speaking of legal obligations. At least some German autobahns have no speed limit, and thus there are no legal obligations to drive below some specific speed. Suppose I am driving on such an autobahn. It may well be good for me to drive below 100 miles per hour, but I am not legally obligated to do so. In Texas, by contrast, I am legally obligated not to drive more than 70 miles per hour on a highway in the daytime, even though in some circumstances it might be good for me to go faster than that. I hold that obligations of all kinds are created by particular kinds of social relationships: legal obligations are created by being a citizen of a state; marital obligations are created by being married to someone. A divine command theory holds that moral obligations are rooted in a relationship to God and are constituted by divine commands.

So a divine-command theory holds that moral obligations for humans owe their status as moral obligations to the fact that God commands his human creatures to act in particular ways. All genuine moral obligations are divine commands, and any acts commanded by God are morally obligatory. (For convenience I shall speak of divine commands as directed toward actions, but there is no reason God could not command humans to work towards achieving some virtuous quality, and hence a divine-command theory is not limited to actions.) Some divine-command theories may hold that divine commands are completely arbitrary and inscrutable, but this is not a necessary feature of this type of theory.

Divine-command theories are often alleged to fall victim to a problem suggested by Plato's *Euthyphro*. If God commands us to do what is right because it is right, then it cannot be the case that it is his commanding an action that makes that act right. However, there are other reasons God might command an action than that the action is right. For example, God might command the actions he does (thereby making them obligatory) because performing such actions leads to a good outcome or fulfills some good purpose. In that case the divine-command theory would not account for the whole of ethics, since it would presuppose goodness. But it still might account for the fact that actions that lead to good results or fulfill good purposes have the special status of being obligatory.[3]

If God in creating human beings intended them to be certain types of creatures, then if we assume a certain consistency on God's part, it is certainly reasonable to think that the commands he gives them would be commands to realize those ends. It is also reasonable to assume that the nature God has given to humans would correspond to those ends. Hence, even a divine-command theorist who holds that the ultimate reason why an act is morally right is that it is commanded by God might well hold that what God actually commands humans to do is to live in accordance with and in ways that fulfill the potentialities bequeathed to them in their human nature. Hence, I conclude that someone who holds to a strong version of a divine-command theory might still hold that the content of morality is remarkably similar to that which is specified by a human nature theory. If God's commands are tied to objective values, and if those values also are reflected in God's creative intentions for human beings and consequently in human nature, we would expect God to command human beings to live in accordance with their nature and in ways that fulfill the good potentialities present within that nature.

Kierkegaard and the Ethical Task of Becoming Oneself by Achieving a God-Relationship

So far I have attempted to lay some groundwork for an ethical theory that incorporates both naturalistic and supernaturalistic elements by showing how advocates of each type can incorporate some of the concerns of the other type. I believe that Kierkegaard's thinking provides a good example of just such an approach. Kierkegaard characterizes what we might call the supreme task of human life in various ways.[4] The ethical life is often characterized in terms of self-actualization; it is "every individual's task to become a whole person" (CUP 1:309). Here Kierkegaard's ethical perspective seems

Aristotelian in spirit and close to a human nature theory. Kierkegaard, however, is also famous (or infamous) for his discussion in *Fear and Trembling* of God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Here Abraham's willingness to obey God even when what God commands seems contrary to ordinary ethical standards is extolled as a supreme example of faith.

Now in *Fear and Trembling* it is argued at some length that Abraham's willingness to perform this deed cannot be understood ethically; Abraham is not a tragic hero, the "beloved son of ethics" (113), who sacrifices one ethical good for another. Rather Abraham's action is only good from the perspective of faith, which is distinct from the perspective of ethics. However, this claim that Abraham's act is not ethical seems relative to a particular conception of ethics. In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard seems to regard the ethical as comprising those duties that can be understood and accepted by human societies relying solely on human reason, unaided by divine revelation. Hence a specific divine command given to Abraham does not constitute an ethical duty. Yet if we characterize the ethical differently, this conclusion would not follow. For example, if I define the ethical as fulfillment of whatever it is that constitutes "the highest human task," then it could be argued that Kierkegaard would view Abraham's act as ethical, since he consistently characterizes the achievement of faith as the highest task a human being can fulfill. On this concept of the ethical, Kierkegaard appears to be defending a supernaturalistic divine-command theory. Abraham was right to be willing to sacrifice Isaac because he had been commanded to do so by a loving and just God in whom he had complete faith.

I believe that the human nature and divine-command elements in Kierkegaard's thinking are not in contradiction. Drawing on the two previous sections, we could say that for Kierkegaard the self we must strive to become is a self that was created for a relationship with God and therefore that persons should strive to attain the faith in God that makes such a relation possible. Someone who has faith in God, that is, who wholly trusts in God's love and goodness, will surely have a reason to obey God's commands. Or, from the other side of the fence, we could say that for Kierkegaard God's command to us that we must obey is essentially to become ourselves, to actualize those potentialities God created us to realize. This coincidence of the task of becoming yourself and achieving a God-relationship is expressed in *Fear and Trembling* when Abraham's motive for being willing to sacrifice Isaac is characterized: "Why, then, does Abraham do it? For God's sake and—the two are absolutely identical—for his own sake" (59).

For Kierkegaard becoming yourself and achieving a relationship with God are not two distinct and therefore potentially rival tasks, but the same

task. The self that I must strive to become is a self that is constituted by a God-relationship. Hence I cannot truly be myself apart from God. However, when I attempt to relate myself to God I find that I am called to be the finite self God has created me to be. This is captured very nicely by the formula for authentic selfhood given in *The Sickness unto Death*: "In relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it" (131).

Let us therefore follow Kierkegaard and characterize the basic ethical task as that of becoming ourselves through obedience to God's command. (Those who favor a divine-command theory could characterize what is essentially the same task as obeying God's command to become ourselves.) Though one might argue that this task is essentially one that aims to fulfill our human nature and thus one that is conducive to human flourishing and happiness, this by no means commits the theory to any form of psychological egoism. The self we must strive to become is a self that is intended by God to be morally qualified, and we cannot be ourselves or flourish if we are simply egoistic. Moral goodness does not have to be conceived simply as a means to some nonmoral end, but as a basic constituent of the self as it is intended to be.

Kierkegaard's conception of the self as a spiritually and morally qualified being helps him to import a Kantian dimension to a basically Aristotelian framework. For example, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* it is often said in a Kantian manner that the truly ethical individual does not care about results, but only about whether the individual has willed to do what is right in a pure manner.[5] My ethical task is the Aristotelian one of becoming myself, but when I fully understand the nature of myself, I will see that this involves coming to care about moral duties for their own sake, since my nature is such that I can only be myself when I care about moral matters. My own happiness and flourishing cannot be defined purely in terms of natural goods such as health and prosperity or even family life, but ultimately must be measured by my own spiritual development.[6]

Kierkegaard characterizes the ethical task as that of "becoming a whole person" (CUP 1:346). He mentions thought, imagination, and emotion as universal aspects of human selfhood that must be cultivated by every human being (1:346–47). I do not think, however, that these qualities can be understood in terms of what we might call their differential status. That is, he does not mean to refer to a person's degree of education or artistic giftedness, but to the basic capacities to think about who one is, to imagine oneself as one should be, and to care about becoming that person. The fundamental ethical task must be one that is assumed to be universal, and if an individual's

identity is bound up with characteristics that differentiate one individual from another, such as intelligence or artistic gifts, that is a sure sign that the person is not living ethically. "To wish to live as a particular human being . . . relying upon a difference, is the weakness of cowardice; to will to live as a particular human being in the same sense as is open to every other human being is the ethical victory over life and all its illusions" (1:356).

So far Kierkegaard's ethical view seems to be a variation on the human nature type of view, with the difference that human nature is construed with a sharper focus on moral and spiritual qualities, rather than "merely natural" goods. Contrary to the Sartrean definition of an "existentialist" as one who denies that there is a universal human essence, Kierkegaard clearly affirms a universal human nature that includes some qualities that are recognizable as essential. And furthermore this human nature seems to provide content for ethics. Where then is the divine-command dimension to his thought?

I believe that the divine-command aspect of Kierkegaard's thought comes through in his concept of the individual. A fundamental dimension of Kierkegaard's thought is his insistence that each individual must learn to see himself or herself standing before God *as an individual*. This theme is a constant preoccupation in his authorship, playing a pervasive role not only in *Fear and Trembling* but in *Postscript*, *The Sickness unto Death*, and many other works. I am particularly attracted by an image in *The Sickness unto Death*, in which Kierkegaard implies that every person has from God a unique name (SUD 33–34). My task is to become myself by discovering that name, learning just who I am in God's eyes. This task is the overarching and most fundamental ethical task for Kierkegaard; it does not eliminate the universal task, but it is more fundamental because it is more complete.

We have already seen that this "individualism" is not to be opposed to a relational concept of the self, for it sees the self as formed by relations with others. Is this individualism compatible with a human nature theory? It is, for two reasons. First, the individual self I must become is not entirely idiosyncratic; as we have seen, every individual shares a generic human nature, and there are universal tasks that are included in every individual's task as a consequence of this. So the task of becoming myself is more fundamental because it is more complete; but just because it is more complete, it includes and does not eliminate the universal task. Second, the task of becoming myself as a unique individual is itself a universal task. One of the universal features of human life is precisely individuality. One of the ways in which I resemble every other human being is by virtue of not being identical with any other human being. It is therefore completely consistent to affirm that it is a universal human task to discover the implications of that uniqueness.

I believe that what Kierkegaard has in mind by becoming an individual before God is closely related to what some Christian thinkers have discussed through the concept of vocation. If we think of a vocation not simply as a calling to a special ministry of the Church, or even as a calling to a particular kind of work or profession generally, but simply as God's call to become a particular person, then the concept of vocation can be taken as a fundamental ethical concept. Each of us is called to become our individual selves, and this calling can be understood as a task laid on us by divine command. The selves we must become include a generic human nature with generic human tasks, but they are not exhausted by this. Each of us has individual tasks as well. These individual tasks might be partly thought of as specific means whereby the universal tasks are to be fulfilled. Thus, we are all to become generous to others less fortunate, but for some of us this might require tithing; for others it might require selling all that we have and giving it away.

God may then be thought of not only as commanding us to actualize certain human possibilities that are universally present in human beings, but as commanding individuals to realize these possibilities in particular ways. These ways might be relative to the particular abilities and talents God has given to them and also to the particular life situations in which God has placed them. God might ask me to sacrifice one possibility for the sake of another; perhaps I might be called on to relinquish a career as a singer in order to work as a teacher. Such a requirement might be imposed for several reasons: to further God's purposes in history, or to purify my own character or acquire some virtue, or perhaps just to deepen my relationship with God and the character of my devotion.

These last ends might justify aspects of my vocation that are genuinely unique in substance, not merely in the means by which they realize universal ends. God may call me not only to achieve universal goods in a unique manner, but might have specific tasks for me, tasks that will help our relationship to flourish or deepen, or tasks that will help me realize some unique quality or ability God intends me to have, or fulfill some unique role or function God intends for me.

Some might see in the notion of an individual calling a threat to autonomy and individual freedom, and certainly versions of such a view which would be inimical to freedom could be developed. It also seems possible, however, that a capacity for responsible, autonomous choice is itself one of the characteristics God wishes to help foster. Hence part of my calling might be a demand on God's part that I make some difficult decisions myself, relying on principles and values that I must personalize, interpret, and apply to the particular situation in which I find myself. While God may require me to

live in accordance with certain principles, I must still decide whether freely to obey the requirement. Furthermore, in fulfilling the requirements a great deal of room may be left for choices that can be seen as my own highly personal decisions. God may require me to care about a certain principle of justice or a violation of human rights and work for change, but leave it up to me to decide what kinds of actions towards these ends are most effective and most consistent with my own particular gifts and situation.

One should not of course overestimate the importance of the individual element in my vocation. My fundamental task may be to become myself, but it must be kept in mind that this self is in the final analysis a human being with generic human responsibilities. An ethic that emphasizes the concept of vocation cannot become an excuse for self-indulgent shirking of responsibilities, as when an individual sheds a marriage by claiming that the relationship is no longer "fulfilling" or simply does not represent "where I am at right now." Such attitudes are spin-offs of secular existentialism and have no place in a Christian ethic of vocation. The Christian sees human beings as standing in a relationship to God in which each person, as an individual, is called by God to become himself or herself. Fundamentally, this means establishing or enjoying a relationship with God himself, which in turn requires obedience to God's commands. It also of course requires establishing and enjoying the right kinds of relations with God's creation, including my fellow creatures. God's commands are to realize my universal humanness, and also my unique individual qualities, both in ways that reflect my unique situation and my relationships.

The importance of the idea that God calls us to be individuals is that it keeps in focus the primacy for human beings of the task of relating to God. Furthermore, it reminds us that God is a personal being, and that we can relate to him in a personal way, not merely as the issuer of universal edicts or commands, or the creator of universal traits or qualities. God's omniscience is quite capable of conceiving a task for every individual as that unique individual. Kierkegaard expresses the idea that every person is intended by God to be such an individual through the concept that the Hongs translate as "primitivity" (*Primitivitet*) (SUD 33), but which I think would be better captured by the contemporary term "authenticity." The idea is not at all what the term "primitivity" might suggest. It does not mean that an individual should necessarily forego modern conveniences or "return to nature." Rather, the idea is that there is something within the self that is not merely the creation of society, a set of potentialities that is truly God-given. The individual must try to discover what God intended him or her to be and must then become this; God's judgment, not that of human society, is what

ultimately counts: "Every human being is primitively panned to be a self, destined to become a self, and certainly such every self has sharp edges, but that only means that it is to be shaped up, not that it is to be ground down smooth, not that it is utterly to abandon being itself out of fear of people, or even simply out of fear of people not to dare to be itself in its more essential contingency (which definitely is not to be ground down smooth)" (33).

Chapter 14

Kierkegaard on Religious Authority: The Problem of the Criterion

Claims to religious authority are rightly regarded with suspicion in the contemporary world. The tragedy of Heaven's Gate, in which thirty-nine people who had submitted to the authority of Marshall Applewhite committed suicide, clearly shows the dangers of uncritically accepting a religious authority.[1] Names such as Jim Jones and David Koresh raise the same questions. Such tragedies prompt us to ask whether it is possible to distinguish legitimate and illegitimate forms of religious authority, and if it is possible, how to make the distinction. In this chapter I shall examine some of the roles the concept of authority plays in Kierkegaard's writings. I shall try to show that while Kierkegaard is well aware of the dangers posed by religious authority, he is committed to the claim that Christian faith is irreducibly tied to claims to authority. I shall also look at some of the criteria he suggests for distinguishing genuine from spurious claims to authority, and try to assess the adequacy of those criteria in light of the contemporary situation.

Kierkegaard attempts to draw a sharp distinction between beliefs or actions grounded in an authoritative revelation and those based on reason. This sharp distinction, however, is undermined by his own attempt to show that an acceptance of authority is not arbitrary. Specifically, Kierkegaard, in writing about the case of a Danish pastor deposed for claiming to have had a special revelation, offers criteria for recognizing a genuine revelation. Though these criteria are negative in character and certainly offer no proof that a revelation is genuine and therefore deserving of recognition as an authority, I argue that they are rational criteria and are in fact quite similar to

traditional criteria offered by such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas. Once this is realized, there is no principled reason why Kierkegaard should not employ other rational criteria in differentiating a genuine revelation from spurious ones. Therefore, the crucial role played by authority in Kierkegaard's thought does not commit him to any form of irrationalism.

In conclusion, however, I argue that the rational criteria Kierkegaard offers require us to rethink what is meant by "reason" in this context. On a classical foundationalist conception of reason, criteria for revelation should be developed antecedently to and independently of any recognition of any commitment to a particular revelation, in order to serve as a foundational justification for such a commitment. Kierkegaard's criteria do not meet this requirement, and must be viewed as criteria that are in part developed with the help of reflection on commitments already made to a revelation viewed as authoritative. Such a stance, though it fails to satisfy the rationalistic aspirations of classical foundationalism, is not irrationalist, however, since one can argue, following Roderick Chisholm, that it is consistent with the way epistemological criteria are developed in other areas of human concern.

Postmodernism, Modernity, and Appeals to Authority

Many would allege that a quest for a distinction between genuine and illegitimate religious authority is a huge mistake, for such a quest seems to assume that authority can be legitimate. Such critics would allege that the concept of authority is irredeemable; what is needed is not a criterion for distinguishing justified from unjustified authority but the rejection of authority altogether.

One might think that this kind of rejection of authority is the trademark of Enlightenment thinking, and that a postmodern age might be more open to authority than the Enlightenment, with its prejudice against prejudices, to recall Gadamer's indictment of modern philosophy. Perhaps this should be so, but in reality here postmodernism shows itself to be a true child of modernity. At least for many postmodern thinkers, the heart of the movement lies in its refusal to accept the idea that there are privileged points of view.

I shall take John Caputo as a representative postmodern thinker here, and Caputo puts it this way: "No form of *Wahrheit* has any rights or privileges over any other. We lack the standpoint and the right to make such a judgment."[2] Since one might reasonably think that the very essence of authority lies in a privileging of some standpoint, this seems to imply that authority must be rejected altogether.

Caputo does express the postmodern suspicion of Enlightenment claims to know the truth, or disclose the meaning of Being. But it is worth noting

that the Enlightenment quest for a rational foundation for human life had its origins in a fear of the violence and intolerance sparked by the religious wars of the post-Reformation era, with the contending parties each claiming to possess an absolute authority. The Enlightenment saw reason as a basis for tolerance, a way to eliminate oppression and terror.

If postmodernists have come to see that intolerance and oppression can masquerade under the label of reason, it does not mean that they are inherently friendly to the claims of authority reason was supposed to subvert. Rather, the postmodernists wish to advance the cause of tolerance and liberation the Enlightenment embraced by rejecting the whole notion of a final truth or "metanarrative." It does so on the grounds that such final truths do not in fact represent the outcome of a timeless, objective, truth-seeking faculty, but represent an attempt by yet another particular perspective to tyrannize over its rivals and disguise its tyranny in the process. Nor is this seen as a purely abstract debate; the problem is fundamentally that "blood is usually shed in the name of Being, God, or truth."[3]

Caputo appeals to Kierkegaard as a philosopher who has come to live with what he calls "the flux." It is a little hard to decide exactly what the flux amounts to, but perhaps the difficulty is appropriate, since the flux is linked to "undecidability." Whatever this is, it is vital to what Caputo calls "chastened, postmetaphysical faith."[4] Without the flux, "faith becomes a dangerous dogmatism."[5] He is particularly critical of a religious view that thinks "in terms of a gift of grace given only to a chosen people." In such a case "religion begins to degenerate into a factional power and a force of oppression."[6] It looks as if Caputo would regard any claim that God has been revealed in a particular way to a particular people as inherently dogmatic and oppressive. Yet it is precisely such a particularist claim that distinguishes appeals to religious authority from Enlightenment appeals to universal reason. Hence, whether we look at the issue from modernity's rationalistic perspective or the suspicious perspective of postmodernism, religious authority appears to be a dubious place to stand. Kierkegaard, however, wants to claim that the problem of his time, the crucial "calamity of the age," is "not doubt about the truth of the religious but insubordination to the authority of the religious" (BA 5).

The Centrality of Religious Authority for Kierkegaard

I shall not attempt here to argue at any length for the centrality of the concept of religious authority for Kierkegaard. Though the concept may not receive a great deal of overt attention in the pseudonymous works, it is

clearly a dominant underlying theme, insofar as the concept of authority is linked to the notion of divine revelation. The problem of authority lies behind Abraham's difficulties in *Fear and Trembling*, since implicit in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac is his conviction that God has called him to do this and authorized him to do this. Abraham's inability to justify or explain his actions is linked to the way the action is rooted in God's revelation to him, a revelation that cannot be justified or explained by appeal to rational criteria.

The concept of authority is also present implicitly in *Philosophical Fragments*, where the ironical thought experiment sees the disciple of the God who has appeared in time as owing everything to the God. Such a disciple must be seen as one who accepts the authority of the God in time. Faith is a passion in which reason can accept its own inability to understand the Absolute Paradox, but nevertheless makes that paradox the basis for the whole of life. The authority of reason is teleologically suspended for the person of faith by the higher authority of the presence of the God in time.

The concept of authority is more overtly central to *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (especially with respect to "religiousness B"), and surprisingly prominent in *Works of Love*, as well as the stridently Christian writings of Anti-Climacus. That some earlier commentators on Kierkegaard failed to see the fundamental importance of the concept for him testifies eloquently to the baneful influence twentieth-century existentialism had on Kierkegaard interpretation back in the days when he was viewed primarily as the father of that movement.[7] Some of this misinterpretation is doubtless motivated by misguided charity; thinkers who admire Kierkegaard and consider the notion of religious authority to be indefensible have great difficulty in believing Kierkegaard can be committed to the concept.

Yet it is easy to see that religious authority is not for Kierkegaard in tension with fear and trembling but one of its constituents. Kierkegaard never takes seriously the kind of radical Sartrean autonomy in which the self creates itself. From his viewpoint, the self is always grounded on a "criterion" that is higher than the self (SUD 79). Our ideal selves cannot be created from nothing; meaning and truth cannot be generated ex nihilo. The possibility of "the individual" who is not completely a product of the social system, the individual who does not worship the state as the highest expression of society, depends upon the individual's finding a source of meaning that is for the individual higher than that which grounds the social system. Insofar as "reason" is simply the concrete expression of the patterns of thinking that form the basis of that same social system, such an individual is necessarily

committed to an authority that he or she will not be able to justify to society at large.

The Dangers of Subjectivism

Despite, or perhaps because of, the centrality of the related concepts of authority and revelation, Kierkegaard is keenly conscious of the dangers of authority. In fact, it is fair to say that Kierkegaard is every bit as aware of the dangers of uncontrolled subjective commitments as are the Enlightenment defenders of reason. In so early a work as *Fear and Trembling*, the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio explicitly raises the question as to whether or not the hearer of a sermon on Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac might in a delusion go home and want to sacrifice his own children. Johannes worries about whether he can "speak unreservedly about Abraham without running the risk that some individual will go crazy and act in the same way" (FT 31). The appalling thing about the Abraham story is precisely the fact that there appears to be no sure rational criteria for distinguishing Abraham from a murderer.

Given the dangers, why does Johannes de Silentio go on to speak about Abraham? The answer, I believe, is that Abraham's story exemplifies a possibility that is crucial for genuine human existence. To talk about Abraham is to talk about what cannot be justified by appeal to the rational discourse of the existing order; but if we cannot talk about Abraham, then we have in effect deified that existing order of things. If the established order is in effect deified, then the possibility of a radical critique of the existing order is precluded. Also precluded is the possibility that a human being can fulfill his or her humanness in ways that the existing order does not sanction. If that existing order is in some ways destructive of genuine human life, then the danger of ignoring Abraham is even greater than the danger of speaking about him. Abraham is important because "it is one thing to be admired and another to become a guiding star who saves the anguished" (FT 21).

Similarly, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Johannes Climacus acknowledges the dangers of what might be called a "subjective type of madness" (1:194–97). In the course of his defense of "truth as subjectivity" he recognizes how difficult it is to distinguish such truth from insanity. "In a purely subjective determination of the truth, madness and truth cannot ultimately be distinguished, because they both may have inwardness" (1:194). Climacus does not minimize the danger that this close resemblance creates. In fact, he acknowledges that this danger lies behind the appeal of Enlightenment objectivity, which promises protection against subjectivity.

The Enlightenment fear of "enthusiasm" might appear to be quite different from this Kierkegaardian fear of madness. However, in both cases we have what might be called "uncontrolled subjectivity." Kierkegaard considers the case of madness simply because it is an extreme kind of "uncontrolled subjectivity." One might here consider the fact that in extreme cases of subjectivity gone awry, such as Heaven's Gate or the mass suicide of Jim Jones's followers in Guyana, there is a strong tendency for outsiders to say that such uncontrolled "enthusiasm" is a form of insanity. One might say that Kierkegaard wishes to look at the worst-case scenario for subjectivity. The challenge to the proponent of subjectivity goes something like this: once you have allowed subjectivity to escape the control of reason, what is to block it from the kinds of excesses indistinguishable from madness?

Kierkegaard's reply to this argument is essentially to claim that there is no way to avoid the danger of madness. If one eliminates subjectivity, one may well avoid the possibility of one type of madness but foster the possibility of what he terms the "objective" kind of madness, in which subjectivity or inwardness is eliminated and genuine human life is simply abolished. A completely objective human being would be a kind of machine: an "artificial product" with "glass eyes" and "hair made from a floor mat." The purely objective person is imagined as a kind of robot, a "walking stick" with a mechanical contrivance inside to produce speech (CUP 1:196).

Hence, in both *Fear and Trembling* and *Postscript* there is actually a link between subjectivity and authority. Contrary to critics who see the two as opposed, the subjective individual is someone who has a foundation for the self that cannot be justified by appeal to the criteria embedded in the practices and discourse of the social establishment. Hence, the subjective individual is someone who is grounded in and at least implicitly appeals to a higher authority that provides that foundation. The dangers of such an appeal to authority are fully acknowledged, but the argument is that the dangers created by eliminating such appeals are even greater.

There is a parallel between this argument and one that employs the language of American political discourse. Freedom of speech and religion give rise to movements like Heaven's Gate, and the dangers of such fanaticism are obvious. The restrictions on freedom of speech and religion, however, that would be required to eliminate such movements would harm society even more by squelching any movement that poses radically new ideas and challenges.

Even if this Kierkegaardian argument is sound, it does not follow that complacency with respect to the dangers of appeals to authority is justified. Kierkegaard clearly believes that no surefire method of rational evaluation

can be used to screen candidates for religious authority, if by "rational evaluation" we mean a process that appeals only to generally accepted norms and practices. For such a method of evaluation will necessarily rule against any truly radical challenge to those norms and practices. Alhough we may not have an algorithmic method to distinguish what we might call authentic religious authorities from lunatics, it does not follow from this that decisions about authority are made blindly. Once the impossibility of any definitive rational justification of an authority is admitted, it is tempting to go the "existentialist" route and regard commitment to an authority as a kind of personal "radical choice," made without reasons. Kierkegaard himself, however, does not view matters that way.

As he sees it, an individual who trusts an authority necessarily does so in "fear and trembling" because of the lack of objective rational justification. This very fact, however, also implies that the choice must be one that is made with great care. The underlying assumption is that both the person who makes a claim to be an authority and the person who trusts an alleged authority can be deluded. One can be right or wrong about such things. It is this possibility that produces the anxiety on the part of the individual dealing with authority. But that anxiety also means the choice should be made with care. The lack of any algorithmic justification does not mean that there are no criteria to help a person decide whether a claim to authority is justified. In his writings Kierkegaard himself, even though he claims that there is no objective proof for the validity of a revelation, presents a number of criteria that he thinks will help the individual decide when authority is genuine. In the next section I shall try to examine a number of these criteria and also ask some questions about their adequacy.

Criteria for Genuine Authority

The criteria suggested in Kierkegaard's writings for distinguishing a genuine revelation seem to be mainly negative in character. That is, there are certain characteristics that, when present, will disqualify an alleged revelation. Such characteristics always, however, fall short of positive proof that a candidate is a genuine revelation. One can at most say that a revelation claimant who passes these tests is still a viable candidate. We will examine several of these negative criteria, looking at various works in Kierkegaard's authorship. There are of course significant differences between the person who must decide whether or not he or she has been given a revelation and thus possesses religious authority and the person who must decide whether or not to believe someone else who claims such authority. However, in both cases the essential

factor is a decision as to whether or not a revelation has really been given and whether or not authority is therefore really present. In my discussion I shall range freely over such concepts as "the knight of faith" from *Fear and Trembling* and "the apostle" and "the extraordinary" from *The Book on Adler*, since in all these cases something like an authorizing revelation that cannot be rationally justified is present.

The most important of Kierkegaard's works on this topic is of course *The Book on Adler*. This work was inspired by the case of Danish pastor Adolph Adler, who was deposed by the Church because he claimed to have received a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. Kierkegaard was fascinated by the case because of what he thought it revealed about "the modern age," and he produced no fewer than three different versions of a book on religious authority that focuses on Adler. Kierkegaard never published the work as a whole, chiefly because of concerns about its effect on Adler as a human being, though parts of it, notably the essay, "The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle," were included in other works.[8]

Reliance on Authority: Rejection of the Philosophical and the Aesthetic

The first criterion presented, one fundamental to Kierkegaard, is that the individual who is entrusted with a revelation must appeal to the revelation itself as the ground of his or her message. In *The Book on Adler* Kierkegaard argues that Adler flunks this test in his later writings by presenting himself in the guise of a genius. However much or little genius is shown by Adler's writings is beside the point, since Adler had earlier claimed to have received a revelation from God, and such a claim to authority is qualitatively distinct from any claim to genius. Thus, if someone propounds a doctrine and argues that it is philosophically so profound or aesthetically so beautiful that it must be something revealed by God, then the person making the claim is fundamentally confused: "[T]he one called by a revelation, to whom a doctrine is entrusted, argues from the fact that it is a revelation, from which he has authority. I am not obliged to listen to Paul because he is brilliant or matchlessly brilliant, but I should submit to Paul because he has divine authority" (BA 177).

Kierkegaard's point here rests on the traditional claim that the person of faith believes what God reveals because God reveals it.[9] If I believe what God reveals only because I have myself independently determined that the content of the revelation is true, then my belief is not grounded in trust in God and does not count as an expression of faith in God. Hence the bearer of a revelation ought to ask for belief on the grounds of the revelation itself;

to ask for belief on philosophical or aesthetic grounds is not to ask for faith at all.

However sensible Kierkegaard's view may appear to be, there is a difficulty. Essentially, the criterion does not determine whether or not a revelation claim is genuine, but only whether the bearer of the revelation claim is clear about the nature of a revelation. In other words, it seems possible for God to grant a revelation to someone such as Adler who might be confused about the nature of a revelation. In that case there would be a genuine revelation and what might be called objective authority, but the confused individual would present the revelation in such a form that it would fail the criterion. Nevertheless, the criterion can be defended despite this difficulty. One might argue that clarity about the nature of a revelation would accompany a genuine revelation. Either God would not give a religiously confused individual a revelation, or else God would intervene in that person's consciousness to bring about the necessary clarity. Kierkegaard believes that people who have received a special revelation from God (prophets and apostles—these two categories are obviously different, but Kierkegaard considers them together insofar as both make a claim to be the bearer of a special revelation that has authority) would have a consciousness of having received such a revelation and would have at least some consciousness of the special status this implies. Thus, a criterion of being a genuine prophet or apostle is a consciousness that one *is* a prophet or apostle and has at least some degree of clarity about what that role entails. Obviously, this does not mean that all prophets and apostles understand themselves in precisely the same way; the calling of the apostle might be different from that of the prophet, and even within these general categories there might be lots of individual differences. But this is compatible with the claim that all of them would have at least some consciousness of being authorized in some way to speak God's word.

If we assume that God is not a God of confusion, then this reply seems plausible, at least to me, though objections could certainly be raised, and speculation about what God would and would not do is always a bit uncertain. Nevertheless this reply, if it is what Kierkegaard would say at this point, does require some modification, or at least nuancing, of his position. For his position seems to be that divine authorization is completely "other" and thus cannot be recognized from any human characteristics. One cannot reason from the fact that the Reverend Moon is a genius to the conclusion that the Reverend Moon is an apostle. But the reply I have put in Kierkegaard's mouth does imply that the genuine apostle will exhibit one recognizable human trait: clarity about religious concepts. We may not expect St. Paul to be a philosophical or literary genius, but we may at least expect him to be

clearheaded about what it means to be an apostle. And if there is at least one recognizable trait an apostle displays, we might well ask whether or not there are other traits that we would expect an apostle to exhibit as well. If so, though we cannot and should not seek to abolish authority by believing the authority only when we have autonomously concluded the message delivered is true, we may legitimately inquire as to whether or not the authority is genuine. Insofar as such an inquiry relies on recognizable criteria, it will be at least partly rational, even if it cannot establish any conclusions with certainty.

Rejection of Power and Politics: Acceptance of Solitude and Failure

A second criterion is also derived by Kierkegaard from the means the revelation bearer uses to advance the claimed revelation. This criterion can be summed up in the claim that a person who has genuinely received a revelation will not use worldly means to ensure the triumph of the revelation, but will rest content in God's providence. This person will not manipulate or coerce others into accepting the revelation, and he or she will not fear rejection, confident that the ultimate outcome is in God's hands.

This criterion is presented as early as *Fear and Trembling*, where Johannes de Silentio argues that the true "knight of faith," who has an individual relation to the absolute that shapes his life, can be distinguished from a counterfeit version by the appearance of "sectarianism" in the counterfeit. The "sectarian" attempts to assure himself that he is genuinely called by God by getting the approval of a group of human admirers, "a few good friends and comrades" (FT 79). The genuine knight of faith has no need of such human confirmation, but "is a witness, never the teacher" (80).

A closely related theme is developed at more length in *The Book on Adler*, where it is maintained that the genuine apostle cannot use worldly means to ensure the success of his cause. Kierkegaard says that though it might be possible for an apostle to have "power in the worldly sense," so that he "had great influence and powerful connections, by which power one is victorious over people's opinions and judgments," if he actually uses this power "he *eo ipso* would have spoiled his cause" (BA 186). A genuine apostle must not define his cause in such a way that it can be confused with any human enterprise, but the spurious "man of movement" must have "the majority in order to obtain certainty" that he truly has had a revelation (160).

This implies that the genuine apostle has a certain indifference to the success of his or her cause. The true extraordinary figure "jests lightly about being victorious in the world, because he knows very well that if only every-

thing is in order with his relation to God, his idea will surely succeed, even if he falls" (BA 157). The genuine revelation-recipient will exhibit no impatience, but will be content to allow God's timing to play itself out, content to suffer the loss of everything for the sake of the doctrine bequeathed to him (166–67, 186).

This second criterion raises the same kind of critical question as did the first criterion, since once more it seems we have a criterion by which to recognize a genuine bearer of a revelation, rather than a criterion of whether a revelation is genuine. Even if Kierkegaard is right about the proper stance of an apostle or other revelation claimant, it seems possible for someone who has had a genuine revelation to fail to display the appropriate stance by behaving in a worldly manner. The criterion would in that case rule out a genuine revelation.

It also seems possible, however, to respond to this objection as in the first case, by hypothesizing that God would not grant to a worldly person a genuine revelation, or else that God would shape the life of the apostle in such a way that the person would not behave in a worldly manner. And this kind of hypothesis certainly has some plausibility; in fact it fits the traditional claim that genuine sanctity or holiness is one criterion of a true prophet.

One might object to this in two ways. First, one might argue that at least some Biblical prophets do not meet this criterion. Think for example of Deborah and some of the other judges, who are both prophets and temporal leaders, employing what Kierkegaard would term "worldly" instruments such as military force. In response to this, I think that Kierkegaard's concept of the "prophet" is strongly marked by his reading of the New Testament, where the model of the one who speaks for God is Jesus of Nazareth, who refuses to call legions of angels to rescue him from the cross and restrains his own followers from taking up the sword on his behalf. Nevertheless, the kind of theme Kierkegaard is stressing is not absent from the Old Testament, even if it is not consistently exemplified there. Old Testament prophets also urge the people of God to put their trust in Yahweh rather than the horses and chariots of Pharaoh. The example of Gideon even exemplifies this theme in a story of a military engagement, since in the narrative God tells Gideon to send away most of his army, on the grounds that if the army is too large, people will think that Israel was rescued by ordinary military might rather than the power of God.[10]

The second objection is that one might think that Kierkegaard's concept of the worldly is too vague. Is "being worldly" always to be contrasted with "being godly or spiritual"? Should being worldly be equated with using

ordinary forms of worldly power? Certainly, there are alternative concepts of what it means to be spiritual and worldly, and on some of these, Kierkegaard's use of the term "worldly" may look like equivocation. However, to him the worldly person is simply the person who is not rooted in faith, and a life that is not rooted in faith can manifest itself in worldliness in the sense of debauchery, but also in worldliness in the sense of being completely reliant on what we might call natural means of achieving results. This is not to say that a spiritual person in his sense does not employ natural means and live an ordinary life. It does mean that a truly spiritual person does not put ultimate trust in such natural means, particularly with respect to the achievement of spiritual ends. The transmission of a message from God would be a spiritual end par excellence, and so he thinks that deep faith and trust in God are characteristics that one would expect to see in a true prophet, and such a faith is incompatible with the attitude of the person who relies on worldly power to achieve results.

I think that this criterion is a particularly valuable one in the contemporary world, since most if not all of the evils done by people who claim to have had a revelation from God seem to involve some kind of desire for worldly power or control, either over a small or large group. Like Enlightenment thinkers, I am leery of thinkers who have a truth for which they are willing to kill. An alleged prophet, however, who shows no desire to dominate or oppress others, but is willing to suffer oppression for the sake of the message, seems quite different. Kierkegaard's sure grasp of this point is partly what lies behind his own later emphasis on the martyr as the genuine "witness to the truth."

But once more this implies that there are criteria for recognizing a genuine apostle or prophet, and applying those criteria would seem to be partly a matter of employing human reason, since recognition of someone as employing worldly means or craving social approval would seem to require only natural human capacities. Such criteria would be very far from allowing someone to determine the truth of a revelation claim with objective certainty. This is partly because the criteria are mostly negative in character and are in any case necessarily imprecise in their application. However, there is no reason to think that the application of such criteria would be unimportant.

Paradoxicalness of the Revelation

A third criterion offered in Kierkegaard's writings applies more directly to the revelation itself, rather than the person receiving the revelation. A genuine revelation would be marked, he thinks, by paradoxicalness. In *The Book*

on Adler the alleged apostle is also described as paradoxical, but in this case the characteristic is also applicable to the revelation itself and perhaps is applied to the apostle insofar as he is related to the revelation. That the apostle is sent by God is a paradoxical fact, but the content of his message is essentially paradoxical as well (187).

The nature of paradoxicalness is a huge and much-debated topic in Kierkegaard interpretation, but it is at least clear in this context that the paradoxicalness of a revelation is supposed to function as a criterion of its "transcendent" character. A merely human idea or theory, even one that originates with genius, always lies within what Kierkegaard calls "immanence." A genuine revelation retains the character of transcendence: "However long it is proclaimed in the world, it remains essentially equally new, equally paradoxical; no immanence can assimilate it" (BA 176).

That paradoxicalness functions as a criterion of the genuineness of a revelation is obscured by Kierkegaard's emphasis on the tension between human reason and the paradoxical, perhaps explored most systematically by Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments*, who describes faith as directed at the "Absolute Paradox" that God entered time as a human being. Since human reason as it actually exists is seen as dominated by assumptions of autonomy and self-sufficiency, the contact between reason and a paradox is marked by a clash, and faith in the paradox is regularly described as involving a belief that is "folly to the understanding" (102). We must remember, however, that this clash is not a necessary one. It is true that it is natural for human reason to take offense at the paradox, but it is not necessary. It is also possible for reason and the paradox to be on good terms, in the happy passion of faith (48).

The moral of the appendix to chapter 3 of *Fragments* is that the offended consciousness is actually a kind of confirmation of the genuineness of the paradox. One should *expect* human reason to be offended by a genuine revelation from God. When reason objects that it cannot understand the paradox, the response of the paradox is simply, "Of course you do not understand. The only problem is that you somehow think this is an objection, instead of recognizing that it is in fact one sign that we have a genuine revelation."[11]

What I think lies behind this is simply the recognition that a genuine revelation from God would be expected to contain truths that human reason could not discover on its own, and even truths that reason could not understand after they have been revealed. And here Kierkegaard's view is actually rather traditional. Thomas Aquinas, for example, claims that God proposes things to man "that surpass reason" because we only know God truly "when

we believe him to be above everything that is possible for man to think about him."[12] One of the criteria Aquinas then offers for the genuineness of the Christian revelation is that it contains "truths that surpass every human intellect."[13] An alleged revelation that contained only what humans could discover for themselves might be thought superfluous at best. At the very least, both Kierkegaard and Aquinas seem to think that such a revelation would lack something that one would expect to find in a genuine revelation.

This emphasis on paradoxicalness is quite pervasive in Kierkegaard's writings. A good illustration is found in *Works of Love*, where Kierkegaard argues that the divine origin of the command to love one's neighbor as oneself can be seen from the fact that this command has a transcendent character. This command "turns the natural human person's conceptions and ideas upside down" (24). It is not a command that "arose in any human being's heart" but "breaks forth with divine origination" precisely "at the boundary where human language halts and courage fails."[14] Kierkegaard argues that our familiarity with Christianity blinds us to its otherness: "Take a pagan who has not been spoiled by having learned thoughtlessly to patter Christianity by rote or has not been spoiled by the delusion of being a Christian—and this commandment, 'You *shall* love,' will not only surprise him but will disturb him, will be an offense to him" (25).

This third criterion raises many difficult issues. What should we say about the idea that one mark of a true divine revelation will be a paradoxical character, in the sense that it will contain truths that will strike us as strange, disturbing, or even repellent? I think this criterion, like the first two, is genuinely useful, but it is far from giving us any kind of "method" for discerning a genuine revelation. It could be used to eliminate some potential revelation claims. It also gives us a reason not to reject new revelation claims too quickly, for the fact that we find them unappealing may actually be a sign of their genuineness. The problem of course is that merely being strange and unappealing would not seem to go very far in distinguishing a genuine revelation from cases like Heaven's Gate. It would seem that for this criterion to be genuinely useful, Kierkegaard would need to distinguish between the kind of absurdity that is a criterion of transcendence and more garden varieties of absurdity.

I believe that this is not impossible for Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard himself insists that "not every absurdity is the absurd or the paradox" (JP 1:7), and that one must make a distinction between the paradox and "nonsense" (CUP 1:504). We can make a start here by clearly distinguishing between a paradox and a formal logical contradiction, though many commentators have confused the two.[15] More progress can be made by exploring what might be

termed the "fit" between an alleged revelation and the human condition, in which the revelation can be seen in some sense to answer the questions to which humans must seek answers. Such a fit would be far from proof, since there are many rival answers that might constitute answers to these questions. And such a criterion would not illegitimately introduce a philosophical judgment on the content of the revelation, since the fitness of the answers provided could be seen as in some sense part of the form of the revelation, that aspect of the revelation that makes it a genuine candidate, so to speak. Kierkegaard's authorship as a whole can be seen in part as an exploration of this kind of fit between Christian faith and the situation of existing human beings. For now, I must leave this topic as an important one for further work. I will note only that one must clearly be careful in how one goes about the project. The distinction cannot be made by any kind of appeal to existing criteria of rationality that are used to judge the *content* of the revelation without relinquishing the claim that a revelation must be accepted on the basis of authority and that such authority is vitiated by any appeal to existing rational standards.

Miracles and Faith

Kierkegaard's claim that a revelation must be accepted on the basis of authority and that this precludes any appeal to rational criteria seems to be in tension with his own attempt to provide criteria for recognizing a genuine revelation, or at least detecting a spurious one. He needs such criteria unless a commitment to a revelation is a kind of "criterionless radical choice" made for no reasons at all, a view that Kierkegaard clearly wishes to reject. His own ambivalence on this question can be seen in his claim that "an apostle has no other proof than his own statement, and at most his willingness to suffer everything joyfully for the sake of that statement" (BA 186). Here he seems to want to have it both ways, saying that the apostle has only his own assertion as evidence, but then adding that he has "at most" the evidence of his willingness to suffer for his cause, which is to appeal to evidence from the character of the life of the apostle, evidence that is certainly not identical with a mere claim on the part of the alleged apostle. I think what we should say here is that though Kierkegaard flirts with the possibility that the choice to accept a revelation cannot appeal to any criteria at all, the fact that he himself tries to specify criteria of authenticity that have at least some value in eliminating some candidates shows that this is not his considered view.

Kierkegaard's aversion to rational evaluation of revelation claims is based on analogies such as the following:

- If one obeys a king's orders only because the order is witty or profound, one is actually being disloyal to the king (BA, 178, 186);
- If a son obeys a father's orders only when those orders appear reasonable to the son, then the son does not really obey the father (185);
- If a citizen obeys a police order only in cases where the order makes sense to the citizen, the citizen similarly is not in fact accepting the authority of the police, even if the citizen in fact behaves as someone would who is obeying the police command.[16]

These analogies are only analogies, since Kierkegaard holds that human authority is always relative and transitory in nature, while divine authority is absolute.[17] This difference does not, however, prevent us from seeing something of the character of divine authority from looking at cases of legitimate human authority. The specific lesson drawn is that I cannot be said to obey God or trust God if I follow a divine command only in cases where I have independently discovered or certified the wisdom of the command.

Even if we accept this point, a more careful look at these analogies shows that reason can be used here in two different ways, corresponding to a distinction between the source of the revelation and the content of the revelation. It is one thing to accept a father's commands only when the son or daughter has independently certified the wisdom of the commands. But what about the case when a command appears that claims to be from the father, but where this is not known with certainty? It appears that a careful investigation of the question as to whether or not an order is really an order from the father does not show any refusal to accept the father's authority. In fact, such an investigation could be demanded by true filial devotion, for one would not want to obey an imposter, but only the true father.

Such an investigation of the origin of the command would not necessarily have to take the form of an independent certification of the truth of the message that contains the command, for such a certification might be impossible even if it were desirable, and the devoted son or daughter will not require this kind of backing. Rather, the son or daughter wants some kind of certification, not of the content of the message, but of the fact that the message truly comes from the father. One might look for a signature, for example, or some peculiar trait that identifies the message as coming from the father. Such certification would not be objectively certain; signatures can be forged, for example. Nevertheless, it might be important to the child who is prepared to obey the father.

What might the analogous "signature" be in the case of a message from God? One traditional answer is that a genuine revelation would be accompanied by miracles. To quote Thomas Aquinas: "A visible action that can only be divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth."[18] Kierkegaard's own account differs most significantly from traditional Christian views precisely by ignoring or underplaying the role of such miracles. He certainly considers miracles but dismisses them as providing any help on the grounds that miracles give "no physical certainty" since a miracle is itself something accepted by faith (BA 178).

There are different reasons given here for dismissing miracles as providing much help in recognizing a revelation as genuine. Miracles may be inadequate because they do not provide evidence that gives "physical certainty," by which I think Kierkegaard probably means evidence that is empirical in character and compelling. The problem might be that the evidence for a miracle is not fully empirical, or the problem might be simply that the evidence fails to be compelling, and therefore fails to provide objective certainty. (Obviously, one reason it might fail to be compelling for some people is by failing to be completely empirical in nature.) Yet another reason, which may or may not be distinct from these first two, is that a miracle cannot provide a basis for faith because it itself requires faith. None of these reasons, however, seems adequate to me for completely rejecting the value of miracles in the discernment of a revelation.

We might first focus on the notion of physical certainty. It is not completely clear what this might be, but we might take him to be speaking of a kind of certainty analogous to that obtained by the kind of scientific experiment in which a causal agent is directly observed. It is clear that miracles do not offer this kind of certainty. The evidence provided by a miracle seems far removed from that of a scientific experiment for several reasons. The case of the miracle, by hypothesis, will not be repeatable, and in calling an event a miracle one necessarily refers to God or some other supernatural agent who cannot be directly observed. (Though it should be noted that the contrast is not as sharp as it might appear, since many scientific entities are theoretical and unobservable.) Nonmiraculous explanations will always be possible, and hence the assurance provided seems neither purely sensible or empirical. Nor does it appear to be certain in any objective sense. However, why should one expect that reasons for accepting a revelation as genuine would have to meet such criteria? Evidence that is not completely empirical and is less than objectively certain could still be important as evidence.

Nor does the fact that faith is required to discern a miracle necessarily mean that the miracle is unimportant. In Kierkegaard's language, faith is a

passion that transforms a person and gives that person an ability to see the world differently. A person of faith thus might have skills that others lack. The idea that there are certain kinds of evidence that cannot be discerned if an individual lacks certain skills or capacities is not at all strange; there are many analogies in science and ordinary life. It may be true both that faith is required to discern a miracle and yet also true that the miracle could be important in strengthening and confirming faith. (Of course the person of faith could be transformed by the miracle so that the faith required to recognize the miracle is not precisely the same as the faith that is present after the miracle has been recognized.) In this case the miracle would not constitute evidence if by "evidence" we mean data that would be obvious to anyone, but the failure of Enlightenment epistemology shows how unrealistic such a concept of evidence is. I conclude that there is no good reason why Kierkegaard should not recognize the legitimacy of his own practice in giving criteria for the genuineness of a revelation, and no good reason why he should not extend the criteria he himself gives, notably by adding the criterion of miracles as signs of the divine origin of a revelation.

Externalism and Nonevidential Accounts of Belief in Authority

If Kierkegaard rejects the "existentialist" theory of radical choice as an explanation of how a religious authority is accepted, one may still ask how he thinks the commitment to an authority is made. Specifically, why does evidence play so little role in his account? Perhaps Kierkegaard is uninterested in the kind of evidence miracles might provide because of what might be termed the problem of the incommensurability between faith commitment and intellectual evidence, a problem discussed at length by his pseudonym Johannes Climacus in part 1 of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Even if there is evidence that supports the claims of a religious authority, there is a gap between the certainty provided by that evidence and the kind of total commitment demanded by someone who claims to speak on behalf of God.

Perhaps it is for this reason that John Calvin and other Reformed theologians have rejected the idea that an acceptance of Biblical authority could be based on arguments or evidence, in favor of the idea that a commitment to Biblical authority is rooted directly in what they term "the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit."[19] This idea is often interpreted in an evidential manner as an appeal to an unverifiable inner experience, a kind of inferior, subjective evidence. There are good reasons, however, to think that Calvin is not here talking about evidence at all, in the sense of appealing to any propositional fact that is to serve as the basis of some process of inference. Rather,

he may be taken as claiming that belief in the authority is epistemologically basic, in much the same way as ordinary perceptual beliefs are claimed to be basic. The witness of the Spirit is a theological explanation of how the belief is produced, not a description of evidence to which the believer must appeal.[20] If Calvin's views here are interpreted in accordance with an externalist epistemology, the fact that the beliefs are not based on evidence does not disqualify them as knowledge, since on such an epistemology, beliefs produced by a reliable process or faculty may qualify as knowledge.[21]

There are some respects in which Calvin's account seems similar to views found in Kierkegaard's writings. In *Philosophical Fragments*, faith (which clearly includes belief in the divine authority of the object of faith) is said to be a gift of God which results from a firsthand awareness of the God in time. There is no explicit discussion of the internal witness of the Spirit here, but there is a claim that faith results from some kind of direct interaction between the individual and God, and one could view Calvin's account as simply an attempt to describe the nature of this interaction in more specifically Trinitarian terms. The thrust of the discussion in *Fragments* is that objective evidence is unimportant, if by "evidence" one means to refer to that which can be known in a neutral or objective manner. Rather, in the appearance of the God in time, we have a reality that can only be known when the person is gripped by the passion of faith, which is directly created by God. So Calvin and Kierkegaard would agree that little can be known about God "objectively" (though they would I think also agree that what can be known about God is objectively true).

Although an externalist epistemology may make evidence unnecessary, it is not clear to me that such a position rules out any role for evidence. How exactly are we to think of evidence here? If evidence is taken as providing conclusive support for a commitment, support which is supposed to be recognizable by anyone, then it does seem that such evidence for religious authority will be insufficient to ground a commitment. Such a concept of evidence, however, seems rooted in Enlightenment epistemology, which attempts to show how human knowledge can be built on a foundation of objective certainty. A more chastened epistemology will recognize that almost no significant human knowledge is rooted in such evidence. Such an epistemology will be open to the possibility that there might be evidence that can only be discerned or appreciated from a particular perspective. William Wainwright has argued in *Reason and the Heart* for the possibility that faith might be based on evidence, but that the evidence might be such that a particular form of subjectivity is necessary to grasp the evidence. Wainwright illustrates this perspective by a look at Jonathan Edwards, John

Henry Newman, and William James.[22] The fact that the evidence may not be generally available, however, does not entail that it is not important for the individual who sees the evidence as evidence, nor that the evidence does not play a key role for that individual. To use Calvin's language, one way that the witness of the Spirit might be carried out would be by the Spirit drawing the attention of the individual to evidence and enabling the individual rightly to interpret and assess that evidence. If this is right, then it seems that Kierkegaard's claim that miracles require faith themselves does not rule out a search for criteria for genuine religious authority, and in particular, considering the traditional function of miracles as providing one such criterion.

I am not here claiming that either Kierkegaard or Calvin should be considered evidentialists, even Wainwright-type evidentialists. Kierkegaard in particular seems positively allergic to evidentialist apologetic arguments. Rather, the claim is that nonevidentialist accounts such as theirs can consistently allow evidence a valuable and helpful role in making sense of religious beliefs, particularly beliefs grounded in authoritative revelation claims.

Conclusions: Particularism and Universalism

As I noted at the beginning, the Enlightenment has a certain suspicion of the idea of an authoritative revelation. Of course the category is not rejected outright, and some thinkers are more hospitable to revelation than others. Even Kant, the quintessential Enlightenment thinker, says that "no one can deny the *possibility* that a scripture, which, in practical content, contains much that is godly, may (with respect to what is historical in it) be regarded as a genuinely divine revelation."[23] Nevertheless, though Kant allows for the possibility of a divine revelation, he thinks that one ought to think of such a revelation as a vehicle for the introduction and transmission of "pure moral faith," which depends on practical reason alone. "[R]ecognition and respect must be accorded, in Christian dogmatic, to universal human reason as the supremely commanding principle in a natural religion, and the revealed doctrine, upon which a church is founded . . . must be cherished and cultivated as merely a means, but a most precious means, of making this doctrine comprehensible."[24] The pure religion of reason may first have become known to humans through a historical revelation, but eventually the truths contained in that religion can be based on reason: "Hence a revelation . . . at a given time and in a given place might well be wise and very advantageous to the human race, in that, when once the religion thus introduced is here, and has been made known publicly, everyone can henceforth by himself and with his own reason convince himself of its truth."[25]

This kind of Enlightenment view, which can be seen even more clearly in Lessing, is committed to epistemological universalism, the idea that truth should ideally be accessible to everyone. This kind of position eschews all particularities, and simply leaves no room for a determinate revelation whose content cannot be assessed by universal criteria. Postmodernism has rejected the epistemologies of the Enlightenment but remains hostile to the notion of an authoritative revelation. If postmodernism, however, is really to take particularism seriously, it ought to begin to consider the notion that a person could be defined by a commitment to a revelation that cannot be justified by Enlightenment standards.

Another way of making this point is by reflection on what Roderick Chisholm has called "the problem of the criterion."[26] In attempting to develop criteria for knowledge, it would be nice to develop criteria whose validity could be recognized independently of any actual knowledge claims. Such criteria could then provide a secure foundation for knowledge claims. Yet Chisholm argues that this is impossible. The proper way to proceed in epistemology is to begin with examples of what we actually know and then to reflect on those examples, so as to see if criteria can be developed to account for what we know. The criteria, obviously, are dependent on our willingness to commit ourselves to certain items of knowledge.

In a similar manner, we would like to have criteria for genuine religious authority that could be developed antecedently to accepting any such authority, so as to provide a justification for such acceptance. It may be, however, that this is impossible. We can no more hope to develop criteria for religious authority without accepting some actual examples than we could hope to develop criteria for recognizing works of art without reflecting on works of art that are already accepted as works of art. The status of some of these accepted works may of course be challenged and revised after reflection, but no progress can be made without some commitment to what is to count as art.

The individual who is seeking religious truth does not see the world *sub specie aeternitatis* but stands at a particular historical spot. The "spots" where people stand may well be partially shaped by their faith commitments, but that does not preclude a concern for truth. I conclude that there is no contradiction between Kierkegaard's thesis that a revelation claim must be accepted on the basis of the authority of the revelation, and his own attempt to develop criteria for discerning a genuine authority. Rather, his own criteria should be further developed, and additional criteria, such as the accompaniment of a revelation by miracles, should be developed as well. Such criteria can never provide objective certainty; they are neither absolutely

certain nor discernible independently of the individual's subjective commitments. They do not provide a secure foundation in the Enlightenment sense, and they do not eliminate the dangers inherent in any commitment to authority. This does not mean, however, that these rational criteria are not important. Such criteria may help a person make sense of a commitment that is not an arbitrary "criterionless radical choice."

The picture of the person as being required to justify a commitment to religious authority from some kind of neutral standpoint must be rejected. Kierkegaard and Calvin are right to argue for the possibility that an encounter with a revelation may itself transform the individual in such a way that the truth of the revelation becomes evident to the person. However, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that this transformation might involve the use of rational criteria.

PART FIVE

Kierkegaard on the Self: Philosophical Psychology

Chapter 15

Who Is the Other in *The Sickness unto Death*? God and Human Relations in the Constitution of the Self

> Well, it is obvious that every human being is a kind of subject. But now to become what one already is as a matter of course—who would want to waste his time on that? (CUP 1:30)

What is a self? Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti Climacus famously begins *The Sickness unto Death* with this question. But it is a question contemporary Western culture still does not know how to answer. We are torn between two types of answers. One type of answer to the question could be called a metaphysical answer. A metaphysical answer is one that regards the human self as a type of *entity*, and it answers the question about the self by saying what kind of entity the self is.

The philosophical roots of this kind of view go back to Greek philosophy. Aristotle tells us that human beings are rational animals. In the Middle Ages, philosophers attempted to say what kind of entity the human self is by specifying where humans are in the Great Chain of Being: we rank lower than God and the angels; higher than the other animals. In the early modern period, Descartes employs the concept of "substance" to tell us that he (and presumably other human persons) is a "thinking thing."[1]

Although there continue to be defenders of traditional religious metaphysical views of the person, probably the dominant contemporary view of the self that is the heir of this metaphysical tradition is "scientific materialism," which understands the human self simply as an entity in nature that can be explained via the categories of contemporary natural science. Most versions of this scientific materialism are rightly regarded as reductionistic in

character. Richard Dawkins provides an excellent example when he assures us that the self can be explained in terms of the evolution of the gene: "We are survival machines—robot vehicles, blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes."[2]

The alternative type of answer to the question "What is a self?" is harder to characterize; it is easier to say what it is not than what it is. I think that the nonmetaphysical type of answer to the question is best characterized as providing what could be called a "relational achievement theory" of the self. (We could call it simply an achievement or a relational theory for short.) This type of answer attempts to say what a self is, not by describing a type of entity or specifying an entity that possesses certain natural properties, but rather by viewing the self in terms of its achievements and relationships. Being a self is not being a special type of entity, but rather it is a matter of having a special status, a status that is linked to social relationships. On such a view, a human being may become a self, or might cease to be a self.

Such theories, like the metaphysical theories, can vary tremendously, depending on how this special status is conceived and how it is understood to be gained and lost. The simplest relational theory would be one that simply regards "being a self" as a status that is granted by being attributed by others. On such a view, to be a self is simply to be regarded as a self by others. On such a theory, in a racist society, members of the despised minority may not be selves if they are not regarded as selves; if artificially intelligent robots ever become a reality, such entities will be selves if the rest of us decide to treat them as selves.

More sophisticated versions of such a relational theory may recognize that the attribution of this special status of "self" to individuals is not an arbitrary decision, but is grounded in certain criteria. On such views, for example, to be a self might require one to be capable of certain activities or to fulfill some particular social role or function. Many of the most plausible accounts of this special status connect being a self to *language*. Such accounts move further away from the metaphysical tradition that sees selfhood as a fixed entity by understanding selfhood as linked to the phenomenon of *meaning*.

On this kind of view, which has roots in such thinkers as Dilthey, understanding a human self is not like understanding a physical system. Rather, it is akin to interpreting a text. The human self, like a text, has multiple layers of meaning. There may be no definitive "correct" understanding of a self, but rather, as is the case for the interpretation of a great work of fiction, multiple "readings" are possible, each of which is contestable and may offer greater or lesser degrees of insight.

Charles Taylor, for example, argues that to be a person one must be able to feel emotions such as shame, guilt, and fear. As Taylor understands these emotions, they incorporate "a certain articulation of our situation." To feel such emotions is "to be aware of our situation as humiliating, or shameful, or outrageous, or dismaying, or exhilarating, or wonderful."[3] Such an awareness is impossible without a language which can mark out such distinctions by enabling us to construe our situations in particular ways. We could call this type of relational achievement theory an *interpretivist* theory.

As I see it, metaphysical and achievement theories have different characteristic strengths and weaknesses. Metaphysical theories, especially in their contemporary scientific materialistic forms, tend towards reductionism; they tend to lose the uniqueness and significance of human selfhood. Relational achievement theories, especially in their interpretivist versions, do a better job of capturing the unique aspects of human selfhood. These accounts, however, have difficulty understanding the place of the human self in the natural order.

What I shall try to do in this essay is give a sketch of the philosophical anthropology of Kierkegaard, in which I show that Kierkegaard's understanding of selfhood points us beyond this argument between metaphysical and interpretivist theories. Kierkegaard's view of the self clearly incorporates the insights of an interpretivist view. As he sees it, selfhood is an achievement, something one must become. Furthermore, there are various ways of becoming a self, and these do involve fundamental rival interpretations of the meaning of human existence. However, I shall try to show that there is also a metaphysical dimension to Kierkegaard's philosophical anthropology. One could say that he rethinks and reinterprets the metaphysical tradition in light of existential and interpretivist themes. Even though Kierkegaard is preeminently the philosopher of either/or, we shall see that in his philosophical anthropology Kierkegaard's thought is both/and: relational but also metaphysical.

The Self as Achievement

There is no question that the *emphasis* of Kierkegaard's writings is on selfhood as an achievement, something I must strive to become. This is a theme that can be found throughout the pseudonymous writings. In volume 2 of *Either/Or* Judge Wilhelm advises the young aesthete to "choose despair" (2:211). What distinguishes the ethical life is precisely that through choice the ethical individual can acquire an identity, can *become* someone who is capable of enduring and having a history. By choosing his

despair, the aesthete can take responsibility for his despair; he thereby begins to acquire a self and can begin to live in ethical categories.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Johannes Climacus pours out sarcasm on those who assume that they have already achieved selfhood and have consequently gone on to higher tasks. For Climacus, becoming a self is equivalent to "becoming subjective," and this turns out not to be such an easy thing after all. Fundamentally, becoming subjective is a matter of developing a capacity for action. Therefore, to get a better grasp of what becoming subjective means and why it is necessary to become a self in truth, we must take a look at a Kierkegaardian understanding of action.

In *Postscript* Climacus argues with vehemence against an intellectualist understanding of human action. Though he agrees with the Aristotelian tradition that human action is preceded and informed by reflection, he argues that reflection alone cannot lead to action. If "knowing" the right thing were sufficient to account for action, then "the intellectual would swallow the ethical" (CUP 1:338).

As Climacus sees it, intellectual reflection is potentially infinite. When considering an action, I can always continue to reflect on the reasons for the action, to look for additional reasons or reevaluate the reasons I have. Eventually, if action is to occur, this process of deliberation must be brought to a close. However, thought itself cannot bring about this closure. This infinite character that reflection possesses can be seen, for example, in doubt. Hegel is criticized harshly for putting forward the "fairy tale" that doubt somehow brings itself to a close (CUP 1:336).

Deliberation is only brought to a close when we care enough about something to stop thinking and act. Action is not the product of the intellect alone, nor even the intellect combined with some kind of pure abstract "will."[4] Of course many thinkers would recognize that it is not enough intellectually to recognize a good; we must somehow desire or have some kind of motivational push to act. However, many philosophers see such desires as essentially facts about a person. Kant, for example, tends to view "inclinations" as things for which a person cannot be morally responsible and which therefore have no moral worth.

It is true that there are what might be called "original impulses" for which people are not responsible. But merely to have such impulses is to lack a self in the deepest sense. To live solely on the basis of such impulses is the heart of the aesthetic life. We do, however, have the capacity to develop and form these raw materials of selfhood, and that is what the process of "becoming subjective" is all about. Climacus cites with approval the words of

Plutarch: "Ethical virtue has the passions for its material, reason for its form" (CUP 1:161–62n).

These "formed passions" are, I believe, similar to the "articulated emotions" that Charles Taylor regards as essential to human selfhood. "Subjectivity" as understood in *Postscript* is far from an emotion that simply overwhelms a person, and it is clearly not a matter of a radical, arbitrary choice of a lifestyle for which no reasons can be given. Rather, becoming subjective is a matter of becoming a subjective thinker, not in the sense of someone who knows facts, but in the sense of someone who understands what it means to get married, to face the certainty of death, and to be thankful to God in all the circumstances of life. The person who is truly thankful to God is not merely the person who can parrot certain truths; nor is she simply a person who has a particular momentary feeling of gratitude. She is rather the person who can construe all the particular circumstances of her life as a gift from God and who is therefore disposed to feel thankful not just on occasion but continuously.

The theme of the self as something that one must become is similarly prominent in *The Sickness unto Death*. There Anti-Climacus describes the "purely immediate self" who is in despair but has so little consciousness of self that he is ignorant of his despair. Such a person may acquire "a little understanding of life, he learns to ape the others, how they manage to live" (52). In Christendom such a person will be a kind of Christian, yet "a self he was not, and a self he did not become" (52).

The Substantial Character of the Self

We have seen that for Kierkegaard the self is an achievement, something one must become. Many people do not choose to become anything. They are content to drift with the crowd and be like "the others." Kierkegaard accuses such people of failing to become selves.

Nevertheless, on reflection we can see that Kierkegaard's view cannot be a *simple* achievement theory. This is because the self that the individual is charged with failing to become is in some sense the self the individual *is* already. Certainly there is a tremendous difference between what we could call the minimal self, who is a "bit of a subject," and the responsible self who has a formed character. Nevertheless, even this minimal self must in some sense *be*; if it were nothing at all, then there would be nothing to become—or fail to become. If there were no self present at all, there could be no self to become in the richer sense. Thus, even if Kierkegaard rejects the metaphysical concept of the self as a fully formed entity with a fixed identity, he nevertheless

still understands the self in ontological terms: the self is rooted in being and cannot be understood solely in ethical terms. It is because selves are beings with certain qualities that they are beings who can become, whose identity is defined through their becoming. If this is metaphysics, so be it.

The ontological roots of personhood are clearly seen in two important passages in Kierkegaard's literature. In *Philosophical Fragments* Johannes Climacus discusses the nature of specifically historical existence as a "coming into existence within a coming into existence" (76). This means, I think, that human history involves a double contingency. It shares the contingency of all of nature, since it is part of the natural order that has been actualized by a "freely effecting cause" (75). The second level of contingency is found in human actions, which also involve the exercise of free causality. Thus, human actions represent a "coming into existence" that mirrors the contingency of nature itself.

I think this passage points clearly to Kierkegaard's conviction that humans are both unique and yet part of the natural order. The whole of the natural order rests on God's free creative power. Within that natural order, God has created human beings with the capacity for free, responsible choice. The capacity of the human self to define itself and be a "self-interpreting animal," in Charles Taylor's phrase, is rooted in God's creative power and intentions. The self I must become is in some sense a substantial self.

The substantial character of the self is then linked logically to God as the ground of the self. This can be seen even more clearly in the second passage I wish to focus upon, the famous passage in *The Sickness unto Death* where the self is understood as a "relation that relates itself to itself" by "relating itself to another" (13–14). Here we also see that the self is not simply chosen; certainly it is not chosen in the sense of being created by an autonomous individual out of nothing. Rather, the self must be seen as having a ground, as being rooted in "a power" (14). If we are to understand Kierkegaard's anthropology, we must probe more deeply into this relationship. I shall try to show that the substantial character of the self that Kierkegaard embeds in his achievement theory is grounded in the relational character of that self.

The Relational Self

That Kierkegaard's concept of the self is fundamentally relational will come as a surprise to many. Kierkegaard has been frequently criticized for being an arch-individualist who failed to appreciate fully the importance of community for selfhood. Martin Buber is probably the best-known critic of Kierke-

gaard on this score, but numerous other writers have sounded this note of correction.[5]

Nevertheless, it is clear that the famous definition of the self in *The Sickness unto Death* precludes any account of the self as autonomous and self-contained: "The human self is this kind of derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to an other" (13–14). Kierkegaard, in this passage, clearly holds a view of the self structurally similar to that advanced by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, who affirms that "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it exists for another; that is it exists only in being acknowledged."[6] Why is it that Kierkegaard's critics have not been led by this passage in *The Sickness unto Death* to conclude that Kierkegaard has a relational view of the self?

I think it is because the critics hold two other assumptions. One is that the "other" to whom the self is said to relate is thought to be exclusively God. The second is that God somehow does not count as a real other or at least does not make the self part of a real community. So, the critics think, even though Anti-Climacus's definition clearly states the self becomes itself only through a relation, that relation is only to God and not other human persons, and the idea of the individual self standing before God is still excessively individualistic.

I shall criticize both of these two assumptions. I shall try to show that God is not the only other to which selves can relate and thereby become selves, though God remains the crucial other for selfhood in the highest sense. And I shall try to show that God as Kierkegaard conceives him is genuinely personal, and that the relationship with God forms both the model and foundation for other types of communal relationships.

Let us consider first the identity of the other to whom the self must relate to become itself. It is certainly natural, given our knowledge of Kierkegaard's Christian convictions, to identify this other with God. Such an identification even seems to be demanded by some of the texts in part 1 of *The Sickness unto Death*. For example, in discussing the despair of necessity that lacks possibility, Anti-Climacus argues that the lack of possibility is grounded in a failure to have the right kind of faith in God, the one for whom all things are possible (SUD 38). Throughout part 1 God represents the ground of authentic selfhood and the antidote to despair. Nevertheless, there are textual reasons not to be too hasty in concluding that the other Anti-Climacus views as essential to selfhood must always be identified with God.

The main such reason is rather obvious, yet it is something to which some commentators have not paid sufficient attention. Anti-Climacus tells

us quite explicitly that in part 1 of the book, the gradations in the consciousness of selfhood that were considered were all "within the category of the human self, or the self whose criterion is the human" (SUD 79). Only in part 2, which discusses despair as sin, is there an account of what Anti-Climacus calls, "hoping not to be misinterpreted," the "theological self, the self directly before God" (79). Even if Anti-Climacus had not given us this direct instruction, the alert reader would surely have perceived that there is a dramatic shift in language between parts 1 and 2. Part 1 consistently uses abstract, formal language to describe the self's other. The relationship by which the self becomes itself is described simply as a relation to an "other." The ground of the self's identity is described as "the power that established it" (14).

It is not possible that the use of this abstract language should be accidental or inadvertent; Anti-Climacus is careful and exact in his linguistic usage and certainly not reticent to use religious language. When he means to talk about God, he is quite capable of using the term "God." By using this abstract language, I believe he wishes to talk about the formal structure of the self in a way that allows us to understand that God is the ultimate basis of selfhood without claiming that the actual identity of the concrete self is always grounded solely in God. The ontological structure of the self is relational, he wishes to claim. It is not possible to be a self apart from a relation to something outside the self from which the self derives its identity.

In arguing that the other that defines the self does not consist solely of God, I do not wish to minimize the importance of God for the self in Kierkegaard's thought. God is related to the self in a twofold way. First of all, as Creator, God is the ontological ground of the self, the one who made the self a relational entity that can only be itself by *becoming*. The self is an ethical task, not a fixed entity, but that task is itself part of the self's ontological givenness. It is the form of being granted the self by the Creator. Its *being* essentially requires the self to *become*.

Second, as I shall argue below, a conscious relation to God provides the basis for true or genuine selfhood. A relation to God is not merely the foundation of the self ontologically, but the task of the self existentially. The self that I should become is a self that is conscious of itself as standing before God.

Nevertheless, the self that fails to have this kind of relation to God is still a self, at least a self "of sorts." Though a failure to relate to God produces despair—that spiritual suicide in which the self refuses selfhood—despair is impotent and cannot achieve its goal. The self cannot tear itself away from God ontologically: "the eternal in a person can be proved by the fact that

despair cannot consume his self" (SUD 21). The power that grounds the self ontologically is stronger than the self that wishes to tear itself away and destroy itself and does not allow the self to lose its selfhood (20–21).

God is the ontological ground of the self, but in creating the self to be a self "God, who constituted a human person as a relation, releases it from his hand, as it were" (SUD 16). Ontologically, the self is not released; it finds itself *as if it were released*. Yet this "as if it were" release means that though human selves cannot cease to be relational—they are always defined by a relation to some other—the self can consciously ground its identity in many different kinds of others. There is no ontological freedom from God, but there is ethical freedom.

This can be clearly seen in the description Anti-Climacus gives in part 2 of the "gradations" of types of self:

> And what infinite reality the self gets by being conscious of existing before God, by becoming a human self whose criterion (*Maalestok*, literally "measuring stick") is God. A herdsman who (if this were possible) is a self over against his cattle is a very low self; similarly, a slavemaster who is a self over against his slaves is actually no self—for in both cases a criterion is lacking. The child who previously has had only his parents as a criterion becomes a self as an adult by getting the state as a criterion, but what an infinite accent falls on the self by getting God as the criterion! (SUD 79)

In this passage Anti-Climacus brings together the achievement and relational character of the self.

What makes the self a self is a "criterion," a goal or end by which the self measures itself. However, that criterion or sense of an ideal self is given in and through relations with others. Someone whose sense of self is provided only by animals (the case of the herdsman) or only by other people who are not regarded as persons (the case of the slavemaster) fails to be a self. Such a person's identity is still relational, but the quality of the relation is insufficient to give the individual a criterion that makes for selfhood. Even the child whose sense of self is completely dependent on the parents still lacks a self in the deepest sense. That deeper sense of self is made possible when the child is differentiated from the parents and relates to society in the broader sense, symbolized by the state.

We could easily expand on the rather terse comment of Anti-Climacus here. What is involved in becoming a self in this sense? I think that it is fundamentally a matter of coming to understand for oneself the ideals of selfhood that are embedded in the language and institutions of a society, so that one can consciously pursue those ideals for oneself.

Anti-Climacus is therefore very far from claiming that human selves are isolated from other human selves. Selfhood is a thoroughly social phenomenon; I cannot become a self all by myself, and every human self is shaped by relations to other human selves: initially parents and other early caregivers, and eventually ideals of selfhood that are embodied in the language and institutions of a society. Such ideals of selfhood are embedded in those relations by which humans are socialized and become parts of concrete communities.

God as the Foundation of Authentic Selfhood

I have argued that Kierkegaard's anthropology is relational and that the relations that genetically constitute actual human selves include relations with other human persons. However, it cannot be denied, and I have already admitted, that God still plays a decisive role in that anthropology. Not only is God the ontological foundation of the self; God is also the highest ethical task, in the sense that the highest form of selfhood requires a conscious relation to God. Some critics will still find such a view objectionable and overly individualistic. Does not Kierkegaard underemphasize the value of human relations in focusing so strongly on God? Cannot human persons become authentic selves through relations with other human persons?

Kierkegaard is well aware that a life lived outside the boundaries of Christian faith, and indeed outside of religious faith of any kind, can be rich and meaningful. Even the polemical Anti-Climacus points out that "particular pagan nations *en masse* as well as individual pagans have accomplished surprising feats that have inspired and will inspire poets" (SUD 45). In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Johannes Climacus, while praising Christianity as "a glorious lifeview in which to die, the only true comfort," maintains stoutly that the non-Christian kind of religious life that he terms religiousness A, which is how he says he lives his own life, "is so strenuous for a human being that it always contains enough of a task in it" (CUP 1:557). His goal is not therefore to depreciate the meaningfulness of the lives of those who do not share Christian religious convictions.

I think that Kierkegaard stresses the importance of "standing before God" not because he is unaware of the importance of human relationships, but because he is so sensitive to the power of those relations. It is not because he does not realize the importance of such human institutions as the family and the state, but because he sees how easily these relationships can become confining and even dehumanizing. It is not that he is unaware of the importance

of the finite, but that he is very aware of how easily human beings can create idols from finite goods, even when those goods are relations to other people.

The dangers Kierkegaard perceived are more apparent today than they were in the middle of the nineteenth century. We live in a world in which the identity of human selves is fundamentally shaped by relations such as those of family, clan, nation-state, religion, class, race, and gender. Such relations are a necessary part of our finite human selves; we exist as concrete selves—as men and women, North Americans and Europeans and Africans, Christians and Muslims, Catholics and Protestants, rich and poor. Such relations are not inherently evil, and could not be avoided even if they were. Nevertheless, we live in a world racked by hatred and violence, and much of it is violence directed by "us" at "them," those who are not part of my family, my nation, my sex, my race, my religion, my class. It seems perilously easy for us humans to move from an affirmation of our identity based on those relations that define us to a negation of all those who do not share that identity.

From Kierkegaard's point of view, this amounts to idolatry. When the criterion of the self is derived solely from relations to other humans, then that finite human identity becomes invested with ultimate authority. God in the sense of what is of ultimate worth is completely immanent; there is no place left for transcendence. Surely, one of the reasons for Kierkegaard's vigorous rejection of Hegelianism was his conviction that Hegel, by viewing the state as the ultimate ethical authority, and human philosophical reason as the ultimate expression of the divine, had eroded the majesty and authority of God. The transcendence of the divine for Kierkegaard is not a crushing weight that threatens individual liberty; it represents the liberation of the individual from every form of human oppression and tyranny.

The God-relation for Kierkegaard must be understood as an ultimate and intrinsic good; since God is a genuine person who loves me, and is capable of a relation in which I am addressed, demands may be made on me, questions may be addressed to me, and so on, just as is the case for other persons. However, though the God-relation is not merely a means to bettering human social arrangements, it ultimately must be seen as functioning so as to humanize those arrangements.

Kierkegaard's argument for this can be seen most clearly in *Works of Love*. The argument of that book begins with a strict contrast between all forms of "natural" human love, such as erotic love and friendship love, and neighbor love, the kind of love which is commanded by Christianity. All natural human loves contain an element of self-love.[7] They are forms of "preferential love" in that such loves always select some people as objects of love

rather than others: I am in love with one woman and not another; I choose one person as my closest friend and not another; my patriotic love is for my own country and not another. Such loves are grounded in self-love because the basis of the preference is always some relation to the self: I love my wife because she is my wife, my friend because he is my friend, my country because it is my country. It is this element of self-love that allows these natural loves to become corrupted and which makes it possible for them to generate the strife associated with the "us against them" thinking that is so prevalent throughout the world.

Neighbor love by contrast is unselfish, because the ground of neighbor love is not a relation to myself. When I love my neighbor, I love him or her simply as one of God's creatures like myself. The basis for the love is not myself but God, and on that foundation there is perfect equality (WL 60). In neighbor love, God is always present as the "third" or "middle-term." Hence, neighbor love is not preferential or selfish in character. As soon as I begin to draw boundaries and exclude some people as neighbors, I am no longer loving my neighbor. Though neighbor love is concrete—it is my duty to love the actual individuals I encounter—it does not and cannot exclude anyone.

This contrast between natural human love and neighbor love can be and has been understood as one more instance of Kierkegaard's inhuman individualism, his failure to grasp the positive significance of human relations. However, I believe that this reading is a mistake. Kierkegaard's purpose in contrasting neighbor love and natural human loves is not to argue that the natural human loves must be replaced by neighbor love. Rather, he claims that these natural loves must be transformed by incorporating neighbor love as their foundation. It is not that I must cease to love my wife in a special way, or my friend as a special friend. It is rather that I must, in loving my wife romantically, first love her as my neighbor. My friend is not only my friend, but also my neighbor. "Love the beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let love for the neighbor be the sanctifying element in your union's covenant with God. Love your friend honestly and devotedly, but let love for the neighbor be what you learn from each other in the intimacy of your friendship's relationship with God" (WL 62).

The implications of this run deep. Making neighbor love the foundation of these natural human loves protects them against two types of dangers, the dangers of dehumanization and idolization. First of all, the preferential love can no longer serve as a screen for exploitation or domination. If I love my wife as my neighbor, then I recognize her intrinsic value and dignity that are

equal to my own in God's eyes. I cannot therefore treat her as existing solely to satisfy my needs.

Second, when I love my wife as my neighbor, then I cannot make her an idol. Of course in loving her as my wife, an element of preference will remain. I can only be married to one person. However, since I also must love her as my neighbor, I dare not allow our special relation to imply that other people are not my neighbors. Nor should she allow me to become an idol for her. Our relation must not become an excuse for ignoring our responsibilities to others. In our love we must not turn solely inward, but in turning towards each other also, in mutual love, we must understand our responsibilities to those others.

What is true of marriage will also be true of the family as a whole, of the nation, and indeed of every preferential human relation. Neighbor love is in the end therefore a deeply humanizing love. And this shows that love for God is in turn not a replacement for human love, but the condition of human love becoming truly humane. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard can claim that "the religious is the transfigured expression of that which the politician has thought of in his happiest moment, in so far as he truly loves what it is to be human and loves human beings" (PV 103).

Hence, standing before God as an individual is not a rationale for an objectionable individualism. It is in fact a protection against the kind of individualism that permeates and corrupts contemporary Western cultures. If society is the highest authority, then there is no way of redeeming a corrupt society. It is only if my identity is rooted in a transcendent power that I will have the power to stand up against evil when that evil becomes pervasive and accepted by my culture. This is a message that Socrates and Jesus understood and practiced. They provide us with models of what it means to be true individuals whose individuality is grounded in a relation to the divine that transcends society, and whose individuality is seen not in selfish acquisitiveness, but a life of devotion to the good of others.

Chapter 16

Kierkegaard's View of the Unconscious

No informed observer of the twentieth-century world of letters could fail to notice the significance of the concept of the unconscious in psychology, psychiatry, literature, and even in philosophy. We live in the age of depth psychology, an age in which the notion of the unconscious has become part of what is termed common sense. Despite or because of the popularity of the concept it is by no means evident that the unconscious is clearly understood. Indeed, the very notion that there is such a thing as a singular concept of the unconscious is itself part of the confusion; a little reflection uncovers radically different concepts which are often confusedly rolled together.

Commentators have not been slow to notice the importance of the concept of the unconscious in Kierkegaard's thought as well. The unconscious plays a central role in *The Sickness unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety*, but is nearly as prominent in *Either/Or*, and plays a significant role in quite a few of Kierkegaard's other published works. In this chapter I shall try to give a straightforward account of what I take to be Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious, focusing mainly on *The Sickness unto Death*.

It is of course impossible to discuss the unconscious without discussing a host of significant concepts which are intricately linked to it: self deception, consciousness, and the self, to mention just a few. My account will of necessity treat these related notions, but will just as necessarily treat them briefly and schematically. My hope is that the sketchiness of my comments will be redeemed somewhat by the ways in which these notions are in turn illumined by closer attention to the unconscious.

Situating Kierkegaard's View of the Unconscious

In order to understand Kierkegaard's view, it will be helpful to situate it with respect to some other major views of the unconscious. Two views stand out as deserving special attention: that of Freud, because of its historical importance, and the view of the school of psychoanalysis known as object-relations theory, because of the interesting parallels between this view and Kierkegaard's. Before looking at these views, we must first look briefly at Kierkegaard's Christian faith, which is surely the most significant factor in his perspective.

Kierkegaard the Christian Clinician

Though Kierkegaard was not a clinical psychologist in the contemporary sense, his primary aims as a psychologist must decidedly be viewed as therapeutic. Like Freud he is interested in the unconscious primarily in a clinical context. This is made quite explicit in *The Sickness unto Death* where the pseudonym Anti-Climacus grounds this therapeutic concern in Christianity: "Everything that is Christian must in its presentation resemble a physician's speech at the sickbed; even if only medical experts understand it, it ought never to be forgotten that it is the bedside of a sick person" (5).[1]

It is hardly surprising, then, that Kierkegaard connects the unconscious with pathology. The ideal for human life is transparency, but the unconscious always involves opacity. In part 1 of *The Sickness unto Death* this ideal is described simply like this: "In relating to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (14).

In putting forward this ideal of transparency, I do not think Kierkegaard is arguing that a person must constantly be aware of everything about himself. He certainly does not wish to claim that one must focus on one's own autonomic physical processes, and I see no reason to think that he wishes to deny that in a fully healthy person mental processes might occur which are not the focus of conscious attention. Hence Kierkegaard is not really thinking about unconscious processes in the sense of the contemporary cognitive psychologist, who thinks of the unconscious as "off-line information processing."[2]

The ideal of transparency is rather one of self-understanding, an ability to recognize and understand what needs to be understood about one's self. The unconscious which is relevant is not what I shall call the unnoticed unconscious, but the unconscious which I do not wish to notice, or have chosen to ignore, or perhaps have made myself unable to comprehend. That there are aspects of the self which are naturally beyond one's conscious

purview may be helpful in understanding how the development of the unconscious in Kierkegaard's sense is *possible*, but the unconscious in Kierkegaard's sense is clearly what Freud called the "dynamic unconscious," the part of myself which I actively resist confronting.

In linking his clinical analysis of the unconscious to Christianity, as Anti-Climacus does constantly in *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard opens himself to charges that his view is thereby disqualified from comparison with genuinely scientific theories. If Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious is linked to his Christian faith, can it be genuinely scientific?

Anti-Climacus of course anticipates this objection to his work: "To many the form of this 'exposition' will appear strange; it will seem to them too rigorous for it to be edifying, and too edifying to be rigorously scientific" (SUD 5). Though Anti-Climacus says he has no opinion as to the correctness of the latter opinion, this can hardly be because he accepts the assumption that scientific work must be completely objective and "value free." Only a bit later he tells us that the kind of scientific learning which prides itself on being indifferent, is from a Christian point of view "inhuman curiosity" rather than the "lofty heroism" it would like to make itself out to be (5).

Regardless of the merits of this view of Anti-Climacus in general with regard to science, it is eminently defensible with respect to theories of the dynamic unconscious. This unconscious is what I choose not to recognize, or intentionally fail to perceive. It is hardly possible for such an analysis not to impinge on our moral and religious concerns, since the motivation for such self-obscuring activity will surely relate to what we value and disvalue as persons, what we find admirable and noble, or base and ignoble. A theory of the dynamic unconscious which links the unconscious to pathology can hardly be a value-free affair, since the concept of pathology clearly presupposes a value concept—that of mental health.

Some would argue that mental health is a value concept which can still be segregated from moral values. The therapist should deal with the former and leave the latter for the preacher and the moralist. But this distinction between mental health values and general moral values cannot withstand close scrutiny. It is true that people of different moral persuasions can agree on certain "minimal" characteristics of mentally healthy people. In general mentally healthy people are in touch with their environment, are not crippled by phobias, obsessions, or other neuroses, and so on. But though these characteristics may be generally desirable, there is certainly no agreement as to exactly what they are, and even less agreement that possession of such characteristics is enough to qualify someone as mentally healthy, or that their lack necessarily means someone is "sick." Most therapists would agree, in

fact, that a facade of "normality" and being "well adjusted" can hide a personality which is seriously damaged in a variety of ways.

It is true that in such matters it seems vain to hope for "objective proof" of a view, and if lack of such proof disqualifies a view from being scientific, Kierkegaard's view certainly is disqualified. But such a requirement presupposes a naive view of science and, in any case, its strict application would eliminate not only Kierkegaard's view, but those of such thinkers as Freud as well. Though Kierkegaard's view certainly is grounded in his Christian understanding, he has every right to present it in the marketplace of ideas and try to show its descriptive, explanatory, and therapeutic power. It may well be that the power of such a view will be opaque to non-Christians, though this is by no means certain, and in fact, the contrary is supported by the strong influence Kierkegaard has had on non-Christian psychologists. But the fact that one's ability to recognize the truth is conditioned by one's own subjectivity is hardly a thesis that Kierkegaard would want to shrink from.

I shall therefore take full account of the ways in which Kierkegaard's therapeutic analysis of the unconscious is rooted in his Christian vision. Both his analyses of sickness and health presuppose a Christian understanding of human beings as creatures of God who have rebelled against their Creator.

The Freudian View

It is not possible to overestimate the significance of Freud's theory of the unconscious. Such Freudian concepts as repression and defense mechanisms have now penetrated deeply into ordinary modes of thought. Despite the influential character of Freud's view, and the centrality of the concept of the unconscious in his own thought, Freud's view of the unconscious is not altogether free of tension.

In Freud's original "topographical" theory of mind, the unconscious was one of three systems: the unconscious (Ucs), conscious (Cs), and preconscious (Pcs).[3] The unconscious was closely associated with instinctual demands, which were blocked or repressed from consciousness. (Freud wavered back and forth between the view that the instincts themselves composed the unconscious, and the view that the unconscious was composed of "ideas" that represented the instincts.) The repression was attributed to a preconscious "censor."

The role of the censor in this theory is crucial. It is at this point that Sartre was later to concentrate his criticism of Freud in the famous section of *Being and Nothingness* which contains his critique of the unconscious.[4] Sartre argues that the person must in some way be aware of what he is repressing, since repression is a selective activity. (Note that I am here using the term "repression" as Sartre does, and as Freud himself sometimes does, to refer to the defense mechanisms in general, not to a specific mechanism.) Yet to be aware of the activity of repression would seem to make repression impossible, since a recognition that I am repressing X would seem to imply an awareness of X.

This problem is part of the motivation for Freud's revised "structural" theory of the mind, the well-known "id, ego, superego" view which he developed later in his career.[5] This theory emerged because Freud became aware that anxiety was not simply the result of the repression of instinctual material, but was often a signal or anticipation that instinctual material was not being adequately repressed. Anxiety here is not primarily a consequent of the damming up of instinctual material, but a consequence of the "leaking" of such material into consciousness. To deal with this phenomenon, Freud postulated the existence of unconscious elements in the ego, as well as in the superego, the moralistic element of the psyche which punishes the individual for forbidden instinctual desires.

The tension in Freud's view seems to me to be this: the unconscious appears to be both something primitive and something formed. On the one hand the unconscious is associated with biological instincts which are seen as givens in the psyche. On the other hand the unconscious is something which is formed as the individual confronts elements in the psyche which are unpalatable. This tension infects Freud's whole view of the self, even on the later structural model of the self. The id is the source of the psyche, the origin of all psychic energy. The ego and superego are simply aspects of the id which have developed special functions. It is this conviction that led Freud to borrow the term "Id" (it) from Groddeck, who had written, "We should not say 'I live' but 'I am lived by the It.' "[6] Such a view leads inevitably to seeing the self as a victim and the unconscious as a force which shapes the self.

Yet Freud also wants to see the unconscious as what is formed as a result of repression. Here the unconscious is not simply a force of which I am a victim; it is in some sense the result of my activity as my personality develops through interaction with others. This tension in Freud is part of his legacy, the reason that his successors include both biologically oriented thinkers such as Hartmann, as well as object-relations theory, which we shall now discuss.

Object-Relations Theory

Object-relations theory is a form of psychoanalysis developed in England by W. R. D. Fairbairn and popularized by Harry Guntrip.[7] Recognizing the tension in Freud between the biological and distinctively psychological elements which we alluded to above, object-relations theory rejects the notion of the id altogether, as well as the theory of instincts closely associated with it. On this view, the infant is fundamentally an undifferentiated unity with "ego-potential." The unconscious is something which develops in the individual as a result of interaction with "objects," an odd choice of terminology since what is meant is primarily the significant persons in the infant's life.

The primary developmental task, in this view, is the passage from infantile dependence to the kind of mature dependence which is compatible with having an identity of one's own. This developmental task cannot be carried out properly unless the infant feels a strong sense of being loved unconditionally and an equally strong sense that the infant's love is accepted by the parent. The initial identity of the child is formed through "primary identification" with a caregiving parent. Without a basic sense of security, the child cannot develop an identity which is independent of this "internalized parent."

As Guntrip tells the story (relying heavily on Fairbairn), the unconscious is the product of interaction with this primary caregiver, which in most societies has historically been the mother. The mother is for the child both exciting and a source of frustration, since it is inevitable that not all of the infant's desires will be met. In the developing child a mental image of the mother is formed, which initially forms the core of the child's own identity. This introjected mother figure then is split or dissociated, as the child attempts to deal with the frustrating or "bad" mother by disowning those aspects.[8] The unconscious is formed as the child tries to deal with a part of himself which he wishes to regard as not really himself.

In people who are fortunate enough to have what D. W. Winnicott calls "good-enough mothering," the split or dissociation is not too severe, and people are able to function reasonably well despite the blow to their wholeness.[9] In those who are not so fortunate, what Guntrip calls the "schizoid problem" descends with full force. All of us need what Guntrip terms a "basic security-giving relationship."[10] Those who lack this lose a sense of their true self. They become the victims of the "anti-libidinal ego," the internalized "saboteur" or "bad, sadistic mother" who does not allow them to discover who they are. Unless such withdrawn, dissociated people are able to find such a relationship later in life and repair the early damage, they have great difficulty in feeling or connecting with other people.

As we shall see, this object-relations theory of the unconscious is of great value in understanding Kierkegaard's own view. It consistently views the unconscious, however much power it may have over me and however difficult it may be for me to change it, as something I have formed, and therefore something for which I may be in some ways responsible. And it views the process of formation and the possibilities of transformation of the unconscious as closely linked to my relationships with others.

Kierkegaard's Relational View of the Self

It is not possible to describe Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious without briefly describing his view of selfhood. I believe that one of the best treatments of Kierkegaard's view of the self is found in Merold Westphal's paper, "Kierkegaard's Psychology and Unconscious Despair."[11] Westphal maintains that Kierkegaard's view of the self can be understood as involving Aristotelian, Cartesian, and Hegelian elements in a creative, critical way, so that it is equally illuminating to understand his view as anti-Aristotelian, anti-Cartesian, and anti-Hegelian.[12]

Kierkegaard's view is broadly Aristotelian in that he wants to see the self as shaped by its activity, and the health of the self to be something which is dependent on what the self does, rather than what befalls it. It is anti-Aristotelian in that the health of the self is seen by Aristotle as happiness, and Kierkegaard insists that happiness is not an adequate understanding of the goal of human life once it is understood that human beings are spiritual creatures (SUD 25).

Kierkegaard's view can be understood as Cartesian in that it stresses the significance of the inner, self-conscious life of the individual, an emphasis which reflects the Cartesian focus on the interior life as the locus of selfhood. It is, however, anti-Cartesian in that the self is not merely seen by Kierkegaard as a mental substance, but as something to be achieved, a dynamic process rather than simply being a completed object.

Finally, Westphal characterizes the Kierkegaardian view of the self as Hegelian in that Kierkegaard, like Hegel, sees the self as fundamentally relational in character. (I shall postpone temporarily an account of how Kierkegaard's view is also anti-Hegelian.) The self-consciousness of the individual is not complete in itself but is mediated through the relationship to the other. Thus the "I" cannot be understood except in relationship.

This last characterization of Westphal's is controversial, yet it is of the utmost significance for an understanding of Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious. It is controversial because it seems to undermine the conception of

Kierkegaard as a radical individualist, a conception firmly held by friend and foe alike. And it is controversial because many lovers of Kierkegaard have an inveterate dislike for admitting that Kierkegaard borrowed anything from his archfoe, Hegel.

Even writers such as Sylvia Walsh and John Elrod, who would like to read Kierkegaard as putting forward a relational view of the self, have difficulty finding such a view there. Elrod, for example, says that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works "pay no attention to the ontological and epistemological roles played by the other in the development of a concept of the self."[13] Elrod thinks this lack of a social perspective is remedied in Kierkegaard's later religious authorship, beginning with *Works of Love*, but oddly enough, he treats the crucial first section of *The Sickness unto Death* as belonging with the early, individualistic pseudonymous authorship.[14]

Sylvia Walsh, in a fine paper, similarly bemoans the "absence of a relation to others in Kierkegaard's general description of the self" in the first part of *The Sickness unto Death*, especially given the clearly relational view in *Works of Love*.[15] Walsh says that one must either conclude that there is an inconsistency in the works or else one must interpret the social view of *Works of Love* as somehow implicit in *The Sickness unto Death*. She opts for the latter view, but still finds it distressing that Kierkegaard did not address more directly the relatedness of the self to others "in defining the structure of the self."[16]

These criticisms seem rather surprising in view of the explicit statement of Anti-Climacus that the human self is not an autonomous self whose being is self-contained: "The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to an other" (SUD 13–14). Elrod and Walsh are certainly familiar with this passage. Why then do they not think that part 1 of *The Sickness unto Death* contains a relational view of the self? The most plausible answer is that they interpret the "other" referred to in this passage as God, the "power" which "established" the relationship which constitutes the self. In claiming that Kierkegaard's view of the self here is not relational, they must mean that it does not include a relation to other human beings.

I find this objectionable. First, most obviously and most importantly, these critics seem to assume that God somehow does not count as a genuine other person. But it is crucial for Kierkegaard's whole project of getting the individual to stand before God as an individual that God be construed as a genuine person to whom I can relate as an other. It is the fact that God can be the other to whom I relate, and must be that other if I am genuinely to be myself, that ultimately makes Kierkegaard's view anti-Hegelian.

Second, it is by no means clear that Kierkegaard thinks God is the only other who is significant in forming the self's identity. At this point we must take seriously the interesting differences between part 1 and part 2 of *The Sickness unto Death*. Although it has seemed obvious to most readers that the "power" in part 1 which constitutes the self must be God, several things make it necessary to go slowly in making such an identification.

First, there is the fact that Anti-Climacus uses abstract, formal language. He talks about the "power" which established the self, and about "an other" to which the self is related. Given Anti-Climacus's strident Christianity and complete lack of reticence in using the name of God in other places, I think his choice of this abstract language is intentional and significant.

The second significant point is that Anti-Climacus describes the difference between parts 1 and 2 in a way that implies that the concept of God is somehow not fully operative in part 1. In part 2, the despair which was described in part 1 is redescribed as sin, and the difference is said to be this: sin is despair which is "before God" (SUD 77). The odd thing about this is that the concept of God is by no means absent from part 1. Those who wish to identify the power which established the self with God have abundant textual evidence to justify the equation, for Anti-Climacus frequently uses the word "God" in part 1 in ways which suggest that he is thinking of the other which forms the basis of the self (16, 27, 30, 32, 35, 38–42, 68–69, 71).

To resolve this puzzle I believe we must recognize that Kierkegaard frequently intermixes ontological and ethical discourse in his descriptions of the self. He describes the self *both* as something I am *and* something I must become, *both* as a substance *and* as something to be achieved. This is not confusion on his part, because to understand the self it is imperative to see the self in both of these dimensions. But it is easy to become confused about the relationship of the individual to God and the relationship of part 1 and 2 of *The Sickness unto Death* if we do not distinguish the two contexts.

In Kierkegaard's view a relation to God is in one sense inescapable; in another sense it is a task. In a similar manner, a self is on the one hand something I simply am, something I cannot help being: the torment of the despairer who wills not to be a self is precisely that he has no choice in the matter. On the other hand, a self is precisely what no individual simply is as a matter of course. It is something that one must become.

Ontologically, the other to which the self must relate and cannot help relating to is God, who is indeed the creator of the self. God has created human persons, however, as free and responsible creatures. As Anti-Climacus says, "God, who constituted a human being as a relation, releases it from his hand, as it were" (SUD 16). Notice that there is no true independence from

God. God does not really let the relationship go out of his hand ontologically, but he endows humans with the ethical freedom to define their own identity.

If humans misuse their freedom, they do not cease to be relational beings; that is part of their ontological structure. Nor do they cease to have a relation to God. They may, however, cease to relate consciously to God, consciously forming their selves in relation to what is less than God. One might say that individuals in this case attempt to ground their selves in a God-substitute. Their conscious identities are rooted in "powers" or "others" which are less than God.

Actually there is a sense in which the identity of the self is formed through relationships with others independently of the misuse of freedom. For Kierkegaard, genuine selfhood is a never-completed task of maturity which requires a consciousness of God, or, as we have claimed, a God-substitute. This mature self, however, does not spring from nothing; individuals begin to form their identity in infancy. Thus, when an individual begins to be a self in the most profound sense, he or she already has a self of sorts, what one might call a "pre-self." This pre-self is certainly formed through early relationships. In the developing child, therefore, there is nothing inherently pathological in the grounding of one's identity in those significant others who shape the child's emerging self. Nor is there anything pathological in the adult's identity being partly rooted in relationships to other finite selves. The problem comes into being when the adult lacks a God-relationship and thus gives to the relations with other human selves (and with what is less than human) a priority and ultimacy such relations do not deserve. I am not here talking merely about a case of "arrested development," a case in which an individual does not discover God and fails to grow, but the case in which the individual chooses not to grow by suppressing the knowledge of God.

So Kierkegaard, as I read him, is very far from a nonrelational view of the self. All selfhood depends ontologically on God, and genuine selfhood depends on a conscious relation to God, for which the individual may substitute a relation to what is less than God. All of this presupposes a developing pre-self, which is formed through relations with other persons and which is a significant element in the identity of a mature, healthy self. That the self is constituted by relations with others, including those others apart from God, is portrayed very clearly:

> And what infinite reality the self gets by being conscious of existing before God, by becoming a human self whose criterion is God! A herdsman who (if this were possible) is a self over against his cattle is a very low self, and similarly, a slavemaster who is a self over against his slaves is actually no self—for in both cases a criterion is lacking. The child who previously has

> had only his parents as a criterion becomes a self as an adult by getting the state as a criterion, but what an infinite accent falls on the self by getting God as the criterion! (SUD 79)

Here Anti-Climacus deepens our understanding of the relational character of the self by describing the self as a task. By a "criterion" he means that by which a self measures itself. To be a self is to be a being who is striving toward a certain ideal; that ideal provides the "measure" for the self. For human selves this measure is derived from the conscious relationships with others which have formed the self.

Human beings constantly define themselves through relations with others. A person who thinks of himself as a self through his superiority to the cattle he tends is actually not a self at all; one might say his standards are simply too low. Similarly, a person whose selfhood is grounded in his superiority to the slaves he owns fails to be a self. In this case it is not that he is not related to other selves; his slaves are persons. It is that in regarding the slaves as slaves, the owner does not regard them as genuine persons. Hence his measure is still a defective one, and this infects his own self-conception.

Kierkegaard therefore recognizes that actual human selves are formed rationally, but he thinks that a self which *only* has other human beings as its measure, even the "adult" who takes the official standards certified by the state as his measure, can never be secure. Genuine selfhood requires that the self stand consciously before God.

This means that though the ontological "power" which grounds the self is always God, insofar as the self is a task it is shaped by "powers" that are less than God. In the infant and the child this is not pathological; and even in the healthy adult, relations to others continue to form part of one's identity. This is proper so long as those relations have an appropriate priority. Unfortunately, human beings are sinners and hence do not maintain "an absolute relation to the absolute and a relative relation to the relative," as Johannes Climacus describes the task in *Postscript* (CUP 1:414). Other humans (and what is subhuman) do function as "God-substitutes."

Self-Deception and the Divided Self

In understanding the self as an achievement, Kierkegaard fundamentally divorces his view from the Cartesian conception of the self as a unified, self-transparent consciousness. What Descartes sees as the essence of the self, Kierkegaard views as the goal. The actual self God creates includes within it diverse possibilities, and with these are given the possibility of forming a unified self. These possibilities are not bare possibilities, but concrete

potentialities of an actual bodily being. The self is not purely a set of possibilities, since there must be an actual being to contain the possibilities, as it were, and this actual being must be or contain an agent which has the power of choice. Otherwise freedom and responsibility would not exist. However, there is no reason to think that this agency is a transparent, unified Cartesian self. Rather, the self contains within itself "obscure powers," to use the telling phrase of Judge William (EO 2:164).

Such a claim by itself only brings us to what we have called the unnoticed unconscious, and does not explain the reality of the dynamic unconscious. For that, will and choice must be brought into the story. The dissociation of consciousness is, however, part of the explanation of the possibility of the dynamic unconscious.

Many philosophers have, under the influence of a Cartesian picture of the self, denied that self-deception is really possible. Analyzing self-deception as a lie to oneself, they have argued that such a lie is impossible, since the person would have to be both deceiver and deceived, both the liar and the one lied to, and this requires that the person both know the truth and not know the truth. If the self were a unified, Cartesian, transparent mind, this would indeed be impossible.

It is not, however, impossible for the same person to be both deceiver and deceived if there is duality in the self. If my consciousness is dissociated, then this is completely possible, and in fact occurs frequently. Nothing is more common, in a case of self-deception, for the person to see in retrospect that he knew the truth all along and yet failed to admit it to himself.

One might object at this point that such a view compromises the unity of the self, and still does not solve the problem of how self-deception is possible. For self-deception requires that it be the same self that both knows and does not know the truth. If the self's knowledge of itself is dissociated, so that the consciousness of the truth is divorced from the consciousness which obscures the truth, then have we not divided the self into two selves, innocent victim and guilty deceiver?

To answer this objection, we must explore the process by which the divided self comes into being. While it is a dissociated consciousness that makes self-deception possible, self-deception is a special kind of division in the self. In such a case the division in the self can be traced to the will of the self. In cases of self-deception the dissociation in consciousness is not simply a natural fact but is grounded in the choices the person has made.

As we have noted, self-deception appears paradoxical, and some have alleged that it is literally impossible. To deceive myself I must know the truth and intentionally obscure the truth. But how can I convince myself that

what I know is true is not true? Such a project seems as difficult as trying not to think of a pink elephant. It might seem that the harder one tries to do it, the more difficult the task becomes. Kierkegaard's answer to this problem rests on the fact that human beings are temporal creatures and that the process of self-deception is therefore a temporal process.

The problem is treated by Anti-Climacus in several passages, most notably in the course of analyzing the Socratic principle that sin is ignorance. Anti-Climacus agrees that from a Christian perspective this is in a sense correct. Sin is a kind of ignorance, or preferably, stupidity (SUD 88). What the Socratic view does not recognize is that it is a willed ignorance, an ignorance for which the individual is culpable. Obviously, however, to say that the ignorance is willed is to say that it involves self-deception, for to will to be ignorant of something, I must in some way be aware of the knowledge which I will to suppress.

Anti-Climacus wishes to trace evil back ultimately then to the will. But he recognizes that it is rare if not impossible for the individual simply to will what he knows to be evil. The normal process is for the will to corrupt one's knowledge; sin goes hand in hand with self-deception.

This process of corruption is a temporal one. When the will does not want to do what a person knows to be right, the usual response is not for the individual consciously to do what he knows to be wrong, but simply to delay doing anything. "Willing allows some time to pass, an interim called 'We will look at that tomorrow'" (SUD 94). This period of time allows the individual to carry out any number of strategies to subvert his understanding. "The lower nature has its strength in stretching things out" (94). Eventually, "little by little," Anti-Climacus says (56), the understanding is changed so that knowing and willing can "understand each other," can "agree completely" (94).

What are some of these strategies? One is simply to delay, to wait for the knowledge to decay. Since we have seen that human beings are not Cartesian selves, and since they are temporal creatures, delay may result in some dissociation naturally. As Anti-Climacus puts it, the knowledge simply "dims" or "becomes obscure." The fact that this is a natural process does not absolve the individual of responsibility, for it is the willed delay that makes this dimming possible, and the individual is guilty for the delay since it is motivated by the hope that just this dimming will occur. At particular moments the knowledge may come to consciousness, but over time these moments come more and more infrequently, and the consciousness involved becomes more and more dim.

A second strategy is distraction. Here the individual does not merely wait for nature to take its course, but actively intervenes. "He may perhaps try to preserve a darkness about his condition through diversions and in other ways, for example, through work and busyness as means of diversion, yet in such a way that he is not entirely clear why he is doing it, that it is to keep himself in the dark" (SUD 48).

Here Kierkegaard is helping us see that it is possible intentionally to avoid thinking of a pink elephant. Obviously one must think of a pink elephant at some time to have this intention, but the intention is nevertheless one that can be successfully carried out over time. Eventually one can put oneself into a state in which one is not thinking of a pink elephant. The trick is diversion. One must focus on something else. If the something else is engrossing enough for me to lose myself in it, I will eventually forget the elephant.

In the same way, if I plunge into various activities: useful work, committees, sports, games, or even religious work, I may eventually find that the disturbing insights into who I am no longer haunt my consciousness. The individual may even, Anti-Climacus says, do this with a certain shrewdness or insight into what is going on. That is, he may recognize in general terms that this process of diverting himself is a way of "sinking his soul in darkness" (SUD 48). This is psychologically possible so long as the individual does not clearly focus on the specific insights he wishes to avoid.

Such strategies could usefully be termed "defenses," to use Freudian language, since they are crucial not only in obscuring our self-knowledge originally, but also in keeping the troubling knowledge at bay. Kierkegaard does not systematically catalogue the various defenses available to human beings, but he does give interesting and insightful analyses of a variety of such strategies.

One of the most common and dangerous of such defenses might be termed "intellectualizing." The self-knowledge in question is existential knowledge, knowledge about how life should be lived. It is tempting for the individual to substitute for such knowledge a kind of intellectual knowledge. I convince myself that I am ethical because I know a lot about ethical theory. I convince myself that I am a Christian because I know a lot of theology. It is this kind of defense that Kierkegaard thinks the educated intellectual, "the professor," is particularly prone to, and it is one on which he pours unwavering scorn.

Even Socrates had recognized that there was a difference between "understanding and understanding." What Socrates failed to see was that the intellectual understanding which in the genuine sense is no understanding at all is not simply ignorance. There is a difference between "not *being able* to

understand and not *willing* to understand" (SUD 95; italics in original). Intellectual understanding can be a defense against genuine understanding.

Self-Deception and Sin

The paradoxicalness of self-deception and the difficulty of understanding it underlie one of the central problems of *The Sickness unto Death*, namely the paradoxical attitude of Anti-Climacus toward unconscious despair and toward paganism, the "despairing unawareness of God" (81). On the one hand Anti-Climacus clearly wants to say that there can be unconscious despair. "Not being in despair, not being conscious of being in despair, is precisely a form of despair" (23). On the other hand, unconscious despair does not quite seem to be despair in a full-blooded sense; such despair one is tempted, humanly speaking, to describe as a kind of innocence. "It is almost dialectical whether one has the right to call such a state despair" (42).

This ambivalence about unconscious despair is even more pronounced with respect to unconscious sin, as well it might be, since sin for Anti-Climacus is an intensified form of conscious despair. Sin is a spiritual disorder, and a spiritless being would seem to be incapable of sin. On the one hand Anti-Climacus seems to view paganism as a kind of innocence: "The sin of paganism was essentially despairing unawareness of God. . . . From another point of view, it is therefore true that in the strictest sense the pagan did not sin, for he did not sin before God, and all sin is before God" (SUD 81).

Yet in the final analysis Anti-Climacus is loathe to give the pagan a blanket dispensation, and recognizes the strangeness of a view that absolves paganism of sin. "Christianity regards everything as under sin; we have tried to describe the Christian point of view as strictly as possible—and then this strange result emerges, this strange result that sin is not to be found at all in paganism but only in Judaism and Christendom, and there again very rarely" (SUD 101). So Anti-Climacus retreats from the general absolution of the pagan and insists that the lack of consciousness which forms the basis of the pagan's "innocence" is itself culpable and must be seen therefore as grounded in self-deception. "Is it [being in a state of spiritlessness] something that happens to a person? No, it is his own fault. No one is born as spiritless, and however many go to their death with this spiritlessness as the one and only outcome of their lives, it is not the fault of life" (102).

The problem is that this suggests that the ignorance cannot have been complete. One must have, or at least one must have had, spirit in order to have become spiritless. To be spiritless is to lack a consciousness of God.

Kierkegaard's view here seems to lead to the conclusion that there is in all human beings an original knowledge of God, a knowledge which becomes obscured and repressed over time, but which is nonetheless enough to make the individual responsible.

Is There a Natural Awareness of God in All Humans?

This view that there is something like a universal, natural knowledge of God is puzzling and difficult to accept, but it seems implicit at many points in Kierkegaard's authorship and explicit at a few points. In the *Papirer*, in a draft version of *Philosophical Fragments*, it is said that there has never been a genuine atheist, only people who did not wish to "let what they knew, that God existed, get power over their minds" (JP 3:662). The hostility to the idea of proving God's existence in both *Postscript* and *Fragments* seems to be linked to the idea that such proofs are unnecessary because God is in some sense already present to human beings (CUP 1:545).

One may reasonably ask what form such a universal knowledge of God takes. Many people do not seem to have any conscious awareness of God. This fact is quite compatible with Kierkegaard's view, of course, since the thesis is not that everyone is actually aware of God. The whole point of much of *The Sickness unto Death* is that this knowledge has become repressed, and that understanding this repression is the key to understanding the unconscious in humans. Still, in order to repress this knowledge, humans must once have had it, and one may reasonably ask whether such a view is in accord with what we know about human psychological development.

To make sense of Kierkegaard's position, I think we must distinguish between a conscious awareness of God, and a conscious awareness of God *as* God. It is implausible to claim that the latter kind of knowledge is universally present in human beings, even originally or as a kind of potential knowledge. It is not, however, absurd to maintain that human beings in fact have an awareness of God, even though they do not always understand that it is God whom they are aware of. Anti-Climacus explicitly claims that it is conscience which constitutes the relationship to God (SUD 124). This is consistent with the general Kierkegaardian view that the religious life, while never reducible to the ethical life, always arises out of a confrontation with ethical ideals.

Every child does not have a clear, explicit understanding of the nature of God. However, Kierkegaard thinks that every child does encounter ideals which are experienced as absolute in character, and in experiencing these ide-

als gains some sense of the "infinity" of the self. (A degree of cultural relativity in the content of the ideals does not matter, since it is their absolute form which is determinative.) In encountering such ideals I gain a sense of my self as more than a product of accidental circumstances. I am rather called to exercise responsible choice and become the ideal self I see it as my task to become. Kierkegaard understands this call to be the call or claim God makes on the self. Whether the child understands this or not, such an encounter is an encounter with the ontological "other" which is the "power" which constitutes the self.

Conscience and the Self

That conscience is decisive in the development of the self is not a thesis unique to Kierkegaard. In a way this is Freud's view as well, since for Freud, the resolution of the Oedipus conflict and the development of the superego are also decisive in becoming an adult. The differences with Freud are, however, more significant than the similarities. For Freud, the superego is simply the internalized parent; there is no question of the superego as in any sense the voice of God. It does not represent absolute truth but cultural relativity. For Kierkegaard, conscience, while certainly reflecting cultural norms, also reflects the coming into being in a human person of a sense of his own freedom and responsibility through an encounter with ideals that have absolute validity.

This difference makes one suspect that the Freudian superego and the Kierkegaardian conscience are simply not identical. I think this suspicion is correct and that its correctness can be seen by looking at the crucial time period when each is formed. For the superego the crucial age is clearly around three. However, this cannot be the crucial age for the development of conscience in the significant sense for Kierkegaard. Once conscience is in place the capacity of the individual to despair and to sin is in place as well, but it is well known that Kierkegaard did not think children were capable of sin in any genuine sense. Anti-Climacus says plainly that children are not capable of despair, but only bad temper (SUD 49n.).

I think therefore that we must look to adolescence or at least preadolescence as the crucial period for the emergence of conscience in the Kierkegaardian sense. (The exact age surely differs from child to child.) It is in adolescence that the individual discovers that he or she must choose and affirm—or reject—what has been handed down to him or her by culture. Such a call to responsible choice is at the same time a discovery that choices

matter—that one is called to choose responsibly. In Kierkegaard's language it is the discovery that human persons are spirit, and Kierkegaard interprets this encounter as God's call to individuals to become what God has created them to be.

One other significant difference between Freudian and Kierkegaardian views now comes into view, and that concerns the relation between conscience, pathology, and the unconscious. For Freud, the overactive superego is a source of pathology. It is the sadistic, internal saboteur which must be tamed and moderated for the sake of individual psychological health, even if we must retain it in some form for the sake of civilized society. Kierkegaard is hardly ignorant of the torments of the overly active conscience, but he is far from seeing this as the most significant source of human sickness.

Like Freud, he favors an approach to the child's development which avoids excessive guilt. The imposition of strict Christian concepts on the child is even characterized as a "rape, be it ever so well meant" (CUP 1:603). Children who are victims of such a rape have a struggle to go through, as they attempt to come to terms with the love and forgiveness of God.

Despite this apparent agreement with Freud and neo-Freudians who see the major problem of human life to be guilt-feelings caused by an overactive superego, Kierkegaard would by no means be enthusiastic about the banishment of guilt from contemporary life. The real problem is not that we have excessive guilt feelings, but that we avoid coming to terms with the fact that we are really guilty.

The development of the pathological unconscious must be seen in connection with just this point. The motivation for the development of the unconscious is our sensuousness, our failure to rise above the categories of what feels pleasant and unpleasant, for the experience of guilt is decidedly unpleasant. Most human beings do not have "the courage to venture out and to endure being spirit" (SUD 43).

When the call of conscience comes, humans therefore have a reason to ignore it. And once they have ignored it, they have a double reason for ignoring it, for to face conscience would be not only to face the unpleasantness of responsible decision-making, but the greater unpleasantness of having decided to shirk responsibility. Thus the dynamic unconscious emerges, the long process of deceiving oneself about oneself, employing the strategies outlined above, and a host of others.

Thus we see that Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious is as thoroughly relational as his view of the self. Object-relations theorists trace the emergence of the unconscious to the divided self which comes into being through

relations with others. Kierkegaard recognizes the role of these relations in the formation of the self, especially with regard to what I have termed the pre-self, the identity the self already has when it becomes a self in a deeper sense. These early relations certainly will involve conflicts, and may lead to the development of dissociation and unconscious processes. So Kierkegaard does not have to reject the views of object-relations theorists about the significance of early relations.

Nevertheless Kierkegaard traces the emergence of the unconscious in the most significant sense to the divided self which emerges through a relation to *the* significant other which forms the basis for the true self. For Kierkegaard the really significant unconscious is the one that I form as an adolescent and as an adult, as I encounter God and deceive myself as I deal with the resultant moral failure and guilt. Of course this does not mean that Kierkegaard believes that the unconscious processes which result from early relations with others are unrelated to the deeper unconscious which is his primary concern. To the contrary, the psychological conflicts and predispositions which the child brings to adolescence are fraught with significance. I believe that these problems are understood by Kierkegaard as bound up with the nest of problems associated with original sin.

In *The Concept of Anxiety* Vigilius Haufniensis maintains that every individual "is both himself and the race" (28). Original sin is not simply a physical, inherited malady. To the extent that I am a sinner, it is because I have chosen to be a sinner, just as Adam chose sin. Such a choice is scientifically inexplicable, but that simply shows that sin must be understood as the result of freedom (32–33, 51, 92).

Qualitatively, therefore, the sin of every individual is the same. This does not mean, however, that sin does not have real consequences for the individual and for the race. The individual who is born to a sinful race does not begin life with a blank slate, but as possessing sinful inclinations, which he or she did not choose and which quantitatively differ from the innocence of Adamic Eden.

I believe that this provides the context for understanding early relations with others and the foundation of the personality for Kierkegaard. Though he will not hear of a "universal excuse," since individuals must recognize that they have become what they have chosen to become and take responsibility for what they are, it is nevertheless true that the child who is the product of a sinful race and a sinful upbringing bears heavy burdens. The self such a child will choose to be is a self "already bungled," a self already seriously distorted and misshapen by bad parental relationships and relations with others.

Healing the Unconscious

To summarize, Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious is basically that the unconscious is something which I develop as I deceive myself about who and what I am. The process of forming and disguising my identity is in turn a process of relating to others, with God as the ultimate and intended other, but other persons playing a role in shaping what I have termed the pre-self and (later) playing the role of God-substitutes in the formation and maintenance of one's sinful identity. This view implies, as we have seen, some remarkable claims: that everyone has an unconscious relation to God and that every person has to some degree obscured this relation and thus divided the self.

On the surface such views may seem implausible, but we must recognize that if we are indeed self-deceivers, then such self-deception will not be obvious to us. Ultimately, I think Kierkegaard's view stands or falls with the Christianity to which it is so intimately linked, and it is well known that Kierkegaard thought it crucial to maintain that Christianity could not be rationally demonstrated to be true. Rather, the possibility of offense must be safeguarded, and we must therefore safeguard this possibility in his view of the unconscious as well. Kierkegaard's view of the unconscious contains an analysis of the condition of the "natural man" which that person can only hope to recognize as true with the help of divine revelation.

Nevertheless, it is important to see how Kierkegaard's views can be used to interpret contemporary psychological findings. Those findings cannot be demonstrative evidence of the correctness of Kierkegaard's views, but if Kierkegaard's perspective gives us no interpretive power, no ability to illuminate our situation, then the understanding it claims to offer is illusory.

To this end I should like to draw attention to some interesting parallels between Kierkegaard's view and the object-relations theory which is, as we have seen, his closest neighbor on the contemporary psychological scene. The parallels are especially interesting with respect to possible cures for the problem of the divided self.

Kierkegaard's claim that the self-deception associated with sin and despair is a universal phenomenon that closely parallels the claim of the object-relations theorist that the "schizoid self" is universal. W. D. Fairbairn, in his important paper "Schizoid Factors in the Personality," recognizes that the universality of his claims will be disturbing to many. "The criticism for which I must now prepare myself is that, according to my way of thinking, everybody without exception must be regarded as schizoid."[17] Fairbairn's response to this criticism is simply that it is true that everyone is fundamen-

tally schizoid, and thus that the criticism is not a criticism. "The fundamental schizoid phenomenon is the presence of splits in the ego; and it would take a bold man to claim that his ego was so perfectly integrated as to be incapable of revealing any evidence of splitting at the deepest levels."[18]

If this is correct, Kierkegaard might well take this universal "splitting" to be confirmation of his claims about the universality of sin and despair. The object-relations theorist also agrees with Kierkegaard that this dissociation of the self from itself is fundamentally the result of faulty relationships with others. Of course the psychoanalytic thinker sees the faulty relationships to be primarily with the initial caregiver, while, as we have seen, Kierkegaard focuses attention on the relation to God. Once we recognize, however, that different ages are of concern here, there is no real contradiction between the two views. Object-relations theory is attempting to understand the initial formation of the psyche, and the focus is therefore on early childhood. Kierkegaard is analyzing the becoming of a self in the decisive sense, and thus his views center on adolescence and the early adult years. We have seen that Kierkegaard does not deny that significant psychological developments may occur in early childhood, developments that may, under the impact of original sin, predispose the self towards brokenness. Also, the psychoanalytic perspective of such thinkers as Guntrip and Fairbairn presupposes the possibility of a genuine self, which can continue to develop and assume responsibility for itself. So there is no objection from the psychological side toward seeing decisions later than early childhood as decisive in the formation of the self.

The significance of such later decisions and later relationships comes through clearly if we look at the views of Guntrip and Fairbairn on the healing of the broken self. Though Guntrip wants to affirm a genuinely "personal self" which can assume responsibility for itself and cannot see itself as the helpless victim of biological forces, he affirms in an equally emphatic way the need of the self for a healing relationship to become truly whole.

Guntrip sees the therapist as attempting to provide the client who was not fortunate enough to have had "good-enough mothering" a sense of identity and security which his parents failed to provide him originally. "At the deepest level, psychotherapy is replacement therapy, providing for the patient what the mother failed to provide at the beginning of life."[19] The therapist does not really use "techniques" but must simply be a real person for the client, a person who is accepting and nonjudgmental, which allows the divided ego to accept all of itself.

From Kierkegaard's point of view, there is wisdom in Guntrip's view, but it fails to capture the depths of the self's situation in several ways. First,

Guntrip, with his talk of "good-enough mothering," ignores the universality of the problem. If the divided self is as universal as he and Fairbairn maintain, one may well ask as to whether any parenting can be good enough to produce the whole self being held forward as an ideal.

Even more significantly, Kierkegaard would, I think, while affirming the need for a "basic security-giving personal relationship" (Guntrip's term), question the adequacy of the therapist to play this role.[20] However much the therapist may try to be a "real person" to the client, one must recognize that the therapeutic relationship is in the end an artificial one. The client and the therapist are engaged in a commercial transaction; the nonjudgmental acceptance of the therapist can hardly be anything other than a therapeutic technique. Client and therapist do not interact outside the therapeutic session, and if by chance they do, one would hardly expect the therapist always to maintain an accepting attitude. Suppose, for example, that the client is having an affair with the spouse of the therapist?

But even if the therapist is a model of love and acceptance, the fundamental problem, from Kierkegaard's perspective, is that such a therapist would still provide an inadequate "criterion" of the self. The therapist would still be an inadequate substitute for the person whose love and acceptance can genuinely form the basis of selfhood.

This is not to say that therapy cannot be helpful for individuals who are psychologically crippled. Though I am not sure Kierkegaard has room for this idea, the therapist may indeed help a troubled individual move toward wholeness, much as a relationship with a good friend may help an individual. It may even be in some cases that therapy is part of what makes faith possible, since for some people the pre-self may be so broken that the idea of a loving, accepting God is literally unbelievable. "Perhaps there are times when the sick are too weak for the surgery that would cure them."[21]

In the final analysis, however, the ultimate cure is not human therapy but faith in God, at least as Kierkegaard sees it. My identity or non-identity cannot be rooted in the acceptance or non-acceptance of another self struggling towards wholeness. Only the absolute love of God can provide the security which allows the self to accept itself completely as it is, while recognizing the possibility and responsibility for becoming what it may fully be. The cure for the human condition is simply faith: "Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God" (SUD 82). Such a faith would mean that the unconscious as that part of myself which I cannot and will not recognize has been blotted out. I would know myself, even as I am known.

Chapter 17

Does Kierkegaard Think Beliefs Can Be Directly Willed?

In *Religious Belief and the Will* [1] Louis Pojman analyzes and criticizes several forms of what he terms "volitionalism," which is a position that regards beliefs as under the control of the will. Pojman distinguishes several kinds of volitionalism.[2] First, he distinguishes prescriptive from descriptive volitionalism. Prescriptive volitionalism is a normative doctrine which holds that it is permissible, perhaps even obligatory, to will to hold certain beliefs. Descriptive volitionalism is a psychological theory which holds that the will actually does have the power to do this.

Pojman also distinguishes direct from indirect volitionalism. Direct volitionalism treats the action by which a belief is formed as a basic action which can simply be willed. Indirect volitionalism regards the formation of a belief as an outcome of doing other actions. Both prescriptive and descriptive volitionalism can be either direct or indirect.

In his book Pojman analyzes Kierkegaard as a classic example of volitionalism. He sees Kierkegaard as a direct volitionalist who accepts both descriptive and prescriptive volitionalism. Indeed, Kierkegaard is said to hold the extreme position that all of our beliefs are acquired by direct acts of will.[3] Kierkegaard and volitionalists in general are strongly criticized by Pojman on several counts. Direct, descriptive volitionalism is said to run afoul of psychological laws and to involve a conceptual confusion as well.[4] While Pojman allows that we can and do modify beliefs indirectly, and thus concedes the truth of indirect, descriptive volitionalism, he claims that prescriptive volitionalism, direct or indirect, is subject to censure. A plausible

ethics of belief must see truth-seeking as a strong, prima facie duty,[5] but forming a belief through an act of will, which Pojman insists must mean forming it independently of evidential considerations,[6] shows a lack of concern for truth. It is in fact a kind of lying to oneself.[7]

I shall not here challenge Pojman's arguments against volitionalism, though in my judgment they fail due to overly restricted and tendentious definitions of the positions attacked. What I want to do is challenge his reading of Kierkegaard as a direct volitionalist.

It should be noted that Pojman's reading of Kierkegaard is by no means unusual. Terence Penelhum, for example, in his fine book *God and Skepticism*, argues that Kierkegaard saw all beliefs as grounded in an act of will, though he notes that in the case of Christian beliefs the act of will can only be carried out with divine assistance.[8] Penelhum also regards this direct volitionalism as untenable, though he is somewhat more sympathetic to indirect forms, and thinks Kierkegaard's position can be reformulated in these terms.

In an article entitled "Kierkegaard on Belief, Faith, and Explanation," Davis Wisdo responds to Pojman by arguing that neither of the two arguments Pojman gives against volitionalism is decisive against Kierkegaard.[9] The first argument, which is an argument from experience that claims beliefs are not under the control of the will because they are experienced as events that happen to us, is less than decisive because the fact that something is experienced as being passive does not entail that it is passive. The second argument, which is a conceptual argument that urges that there is something incoherent about forming a belief through the will, is sound, but only against a stronger version of volitionalism than Kierkegaard holds. Unfortunately, Wisdo is not very clear on just what version of volitionalism Kierkegaard does hold. He says that Kierkegaard's claim is not that I can form a belief simply by willing it, but that the will plays a key role in "negating the uncertainty" which attaches to every contingent proposition according to Kierkegaard (PF 83). It is not clear to me just what this negation of uncertainty is, and how it differs from the acquisition of a belief.

I think that the reason Wisdo does not clarify what Kierkegaard's volitionalism amounts to (with regard to ordinary beliefs) is that he does not see this as crucial to understand Kierkegaard's concept of religious belief or faith. The Danish term *Tro* can mean either faith or belief, but Wisdo rightly notes that in *Fragments* a distinction is drawn between belief in the ordinary sense and belief or faith in an "eminent" sense. Wisdo argues that the second kind of belief, Christian faith, is not a kind of ordinary belief at all. As he sees it, Christian faith is a miracle which resists philosophical analysis.

Unfortunately for Wisdo, this claim makes it mysterious why Johannes Climacus should invest so much energy analyzing the concept of ordinary belief. Even worse, there are two statements in the text which flatly contradict Wisdo's view that faith is not a special kind of belief: "Here faith (*Tro*) is first taken in a direct and ordinary sense concerning the relationship to the historical" (PF 87). "So then, that historical fact [the incarnation] remains. It has no immediate contemporary, because it is historical to the first power (faith in the ordinary sense)" (88–89). Both of these quotations make it clear that Climacus analyzes the concept of belief because he sees faith as a special kind of belief. Faith is ordinary belief that has some additional qualities that make it faith in the eminent sense.

One cannot then insulate the concept of faith against philosophical scrutiny by claiming that it has nothing in common with ordinary belief on Kierkegaard's view. It is therefore important to challenge the assumption of Pojman and Penelhum—the assumption that Wisdo does not clearly rebut—that Kierkegaard is a direct volitionalist in his view of belief.

Why do philosophers like Pojman and Penelhum attribute direct volitionalism to Kierkegaard? The grounds for this reading of Kierkegaard are probably most strong in the Interlude section of *Philosophical Fragments*. Here the pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus,[10] says that "belief is not a piece of knowledge but an act of freedom, an expression of will" (83). He maintains that the "conclusion of belief is not a conclusion but a resolution," and that the opposite of belief, i.e. doubt, is also dependent on the will (84).

We must look at the context of these remarks. The polemical target in view here is the claim, made by Hegel and employed by some religious Hegelians in the defense of Christianity, that historical events can be understood as necessary. If historical assertions could be converted philosophically to necessary truths, then Christianity could retain its historical foundations while at the same time gaining a kind of invulnerability to the ravages of historical-critical scholarship. Kierkegaard's argument is directed against those who would avoid epistemic risk and claim to attain a kind of final knowledge, in this case of human history. Kierkegaard's counterposition, articulated by his pseudonym Johannes Climacus, is the Humean view that all matters of fact are contingent—historical matters of fact being doubly so—and thus no knowledge of history can attain the certainty of a necessary truth.

Climacus first situates historical knowledge as belonging to the category of "coming into existence" (PF 73, 76). All "coming into existence" changes are seen by him as the result of a freely acting cause (75). Thus the realm of what Hume called "matters of fact" can never involve necessity. Climacus appears to back up these claims by appealing to a theistic metaphysic, but his

claim about the contingency of matters of fact is one that many philosophers would accept independently of any view of God as creating the natural order through a free choice.

The term "historical" is here used in two senses. Anything that has come into existence is thereby said to be historical, but there is also a category of events which are historical "in the strict sense" (PF 76). These events involve a double contingency, a "coming into existence within a coming into existence" (76). Here Climacus has in mind history in the sense of human history. This category of events not only possesses the contingency of all of nature, which is grounded in the freedom of God's creative activity, but the additional contingency which derives from the freedom of human agents. Human agents are seen as "relatively freely acting causes" (76). In creating them God endows them with possibilities as well as actualities, and allows them some control over which possibilities get actualized.

Climacus thinks these metaphysical truths rule out any understanding of history as necessary, but he underlines the point with some epistemological reflections which draw heavily on classical skepticism, particularly Sextus Empiricus. It is important to recognize, however, that Kierkegaard does not embrace skepticism himself. He borrows arguments from the skeptics, but he says very clearly that he assumes that there is knowledge of the past; he only wants to know how this knowledge is possible (PF 81).

The account given of historical knowledge is not easy to interpret, but the main points seem to me to be as follows. First, Climacus claims, in agreement with both classical foundationalism and classical skepticism, that there is a category of truths, "immediate sensation and cognition" (PF 81), which can be apprehended with certainty and which "cannot deceive." Climacus does not spell out the nature of this immediate knowledge, which seems similar to Hume's knowledge of "impressions," and it seems to me in many ways a dubious position to hold. However, the realm of objectively certain knowledge Climacus here concedes turns out to be vanishingly small. He gives two examples to clarify his point. The first is that of perceiving a star; the second is perceiving an event.

In the first example, Climacus says that "when the perceiver sees a star, the star becomes dubious for him the moment he seeks to become aware that it has come into existence" (PF 81). "Thus faith [*Tro*] believes [*troer*] what it does not see; it does not believe that the star exists, for that it sees, but it believes that the star has come into existence" (81). This is obscure, and some have interpreted Climacus as saying that one can have immediate knowledge of the existence of a star, but not of the genesis of the star, since it

occurred in the past. Against such a view one can rightly object that even our present awareness of the star is an awareness of a past object, since the light being perceived has taken years to arrive, and it is even possible that the star no longer exists. However, I do not think this can be Climacus's intended meaning, and this becomes clear when we look at the second example, that of perceiving an event.

Here Climacus says that "the occurrence can be known immediately, but not that is has occurred, not even that it is in the process of occurring" (PF 81–82). This may seem even more obscure than the case of the star, but I believe what Climacus has in mind is simply this: both in the case of the star and the event, there is a something, a content, of which I am immediately aware. This something has been articulated by different philosophers in different ways, but he surely has in view what some have labeled "sense data," and what others have thought of in terms of what might be left after a phenomenological *epoche* has been performed. Whatever this something is of which we are immediately aware, it cannot be identified with an object in the space-time world which we think of as "objective," out there, so to speak. To affirm the existence of a star as an object which has "come into existence" is to affirm the existence of something more than the immediate content of my experience. It is to affirm the existence of a public object with a public history. Similarly, to affirm of an occurrence "that it has occurred," is not simply to utter a tautology. The affirmation that the event has occurred entails that one is committed to affirming a "transition from nothing, from non-being" (82). Here the event is again not simply a content in one's consciousness but a part of the public world, and such an affirmation carries with it for Climacus an element of inescapable risk. The risk is grounded in the logical gap between my experience, when that experience is construed as giving me certain knowledge, and the world as I ordinarily perceive it and act in it.

Note that even if one rejects the implied inner world of certainty, this does not damage Climacus's main thesis, which is the riskiness of judgments about matters of fact. One may well find doctrines of sense data and their like dubious while still agreeing that human judgments about stars and events are contingent and fallible.

But now to the main issue, which concerns the implications Climacus sees in the riskiness of affirmations about matters of fact. He argues that it is the uncertainty of these judgments which makes skepticism possible. The Greek skeptics "doubted not by the power of knowledge but by the power of will" (PF 82). This in turn implies that "doubt can only be terminated in

freedom, by an act of will" (82). The nature of doubt in turn illuminates the true nature of faith or belief, which must be seen as the "opposite passion of doubt" (84).

Pojman reads these passages as committing Kierkegaard to an extreme form of volitionalism. As he sees the matter, Kierkegaard is saying that all beliefs are under the direct and immediate control of the believer. Thus if I believe that I am looking at a computer screen as I type these words, or that I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, this is the result of a decision I have made, and I could easily have willed to believe the opposite of these things, regardless of the evidence. Such a position seems wildly implausible, for beliefs are not normally under direct, voluntary control in this way.

I believe that Pojman's reading rests on a faulty understanding of what Kierkegaard means by such terms as "will" and "freedom." First, in tracing belief to will, Climacus by no means necessarily implies that beliefs are consciously chosen. If anything is evident about Kierkegaard as a psychologist, it is that he is a depth psychologist. While Kierkegaard certainly assigns will a central place in the human personality, he thinks that human beings hardly ever make choices with full consciousness of what they are doing. In *The Sickness unto Death*, for example, though both despair and sin are traced to the will, most people are said to be in despair and to sin unconsciously. Lack of clarity about what one is doing is the rule, not the exception, in the Kierkegaardian picture of the personality.

This point is just as evident in the discussion of skepticism in *Fragments*. The Greek skeptic would agree and understand that his skepticism is rooted in will, according to Climacus, "*to the degree that he has understood himself*" (PF 82; emphasis mine). This implies, of course, that the skeptic may not understand himself, may not realize that he doubts because he wills to doubt. Thus, to say that belief is grounded in the will by no means implies that belief is always or even usually the result of a conscious act of willing.

Second, Climacus nowhere says that beliefs can be controlled by the will *directly*. Pojman's reading implies that beliefs can be produced or annihilated willy-nilly, but this is not present in Kierkegaard's text. Pojman simply does not consider the possibility that Kierkegaard may have in mind the well-known fact that beliefs can be modified indirectly, in the course of doing other things. That it is the latter possibility that Kierkegaard has in mind is strongly suggested by the fact that Climacus calls both belief (*Tro*) and doubt "passions" (PF 84). Kierkegaard certainly did not think that passions could simply be created by an immediate act of will. Rather, he thinks of passions as things that must be slowly cultivated and constantly renewed. Acts of willing play a role in this cultivation, and Kierkegaard regards the higher ethical

and religious passions as things we are responsible to achieve. However, by and large, passions are formed on a long-term basis, and they are not simply willed into existence, but formed indirectly through a process of willing to do other things. Furthermore, a *passion* is also partly *passive*, formed in response to something that acts on the self.

Strong support for this interpretation is found in the discussions of skepticism in *Postscript* and in *Fear and Trembling*. A major theme, which parallels a familiar refrain in Hume, is the difficulty of skepticism. Contemporary Hegelians, who claim to have overcome skepticism through a universal doubt which overcomes itself, are mercilessly attacked, primarily on the grounds that universal doubt cannot possibly be achieved, must less overcome if it could be achieved.[11] What the ancient skeptic regarded as the task of a lifetime—an infinite goal which he could only hope to approximate, since life continually elicits belief from us—is accomplished by the contemporary professor in his opening lecture. It is the fact that doubts *and* beliefs are not always under our voluntary control that makes such a professor a comic figure for Kierkegaard.

Of course the same is true of other passions discussed in the Kierkegaardian literature, especially the passion of faith. The polemic against "going further" than faith, for example, presupposes that faith is not something one can acquire simply by fiat.[12] Once more, it is said to be a task for a lifetime.

A plausible reading of Climacus's discussion of the role of will in the life of the skeptic must first focus on the skeptic's goal: tranquillity of mind. It is the attainment and sustaining of this state of mind which is the primary object of the skeptic's will. To this end he wills to refrain from drawing conclusions. A hasty reading may suggest that Climacus thinks that the skeptics can do this by a direct act of will: "By the power of the will he [the skeptic] resolves to restrain himself and hold himself back . . . from any conclusion" (PF 85). Climacus emphasizes that it is the will that is decisive here, not rational argument: "Though as he [the skeptic] uses dialectics in continually making the opposite equally probable, these are not the basis of his skepticism; such arguments are nothing more than outer fortifications, human accommodations" (84).

Though the emphasis is on the will, since Climacus wishes to claim that the skeptic is a skeptic in the final analysis because he wants to be a skeptic, there is no claim here that belief states are under the direct control of the will. On the contrary, there is the clear statement that at least in some cases the control exercised by the will is indirect. Though the ultimate source of doubt is the will, doubt is achieved through cognitive means. Because of the

facts of human psychology, the skeptic must make use of dialectics, "outer fortifications." These may be denigrated as "human accommodations," but it is nonetheless important that such accommodations are necessary. Climacus also says that the skeptic "used knowledge to preserve his state of mind" (PF 83). This suggests that the control exercised by the skeptic was at least not complete, and that it was achieved by such techniques as looking for evidence on the other side of a belief towards which one is inclined, constructing arguments which are equally balanced on both sides of an issue, and so forth.

So Climacus's point is not the indefensible claim that beliefs are always simply willed into being, regardless of the evidential situation of the believer. It is rather the subtler claim that there is a logical gap between whatever totally objective, certain evidence we have for matters of fact, and our beliefs about these matters. It is this gap which makes skepticism as a willed life-stance possible. It provides room, as it were, for the skeptic to do what he needs to do to arrive at a state of suspended judgment, though this is not necessarily easy and will certainly not be successful in all cases. What exactly the skeptic will need to do is not spelled out, and there is no reason it should be, since that is a matter of empirical psychology; but Kierkegaard evidently thinks that what must be done to be a skeptic will include familiar cognitive strategies such as focusing on arguments for both sides of a position. Since most of us are not skeptics, it follows that we are not skeptics because we, unlike the skeptic, do not will to achieve this state of mind. We will something different and consequently do not embark on the activities which the skeptic employs to achieve his ends. Climacus may or may not think that particular beliefs are sometimes under the direct control of the will, but he certainly does not believe this is always or even generally the case. What he does affirm is that what we want to believe ultimately plays a decisive role in what we do believe.

This claim may point to a fact of human psychology that many philosophers find regrettable and unwelcome, but that I find utterly undeniable. Who can observe audience comments after a so-called debate between presidential candidates without realizing that the beliefs of the hearers about who won the debate, who had the strongest arguments, and so on, are heavily shaped by their commitments to one candidate or the other? It is a plain and evident fact of human psychology, like it or not, that how we interpret evidence, weigh evidence, and even what we consider to be good evidence, is heavily shaped by our desires. Of course this influence is generally mediated by my whole noetic structure. In reflecting on a recent presidential debate, I

believe that one candidate was much more sincere and concerned about important problems than the other, not simply because I want that to be true, but because I was already convinced that the second candidate was an unprincipled opportunist. However, the past beliefs which I brought to bear on the situation were equally colored by my past desires, emotions, and values. So will still played a significant factor in shaping the belief.

When we come to what Climacus calls the historical in the strict sense, the logical gap between totally objective, certain evidence and belief becomes even greater. Here we have not only the contingency of all matters of fact, but the double contingency introduced by free human actions. Climacus seems to be right here in maintaining that there is even more room for disagreement and uncertainty with regard to human activity, and hence more room for skeptical stratagems, as is shown by the status of such disciplines as history and sociology, as compared with physics and chemistry.

Notice that Climacus does not seem to adopt a radical relativism or historicism on the basis of his assertion of the significance of subjective factors in the formation of belief. That is, he does not say that there is no objective truth about nature or history. Nor does he claim that our beliefs cannot be true in some objective sense. All he wants to maintain is that our beliefs always contain an element of risk, because the objective evidential situation always contains an element of uncertainty, uncertainty which we resolve in the formation of our beliefs. In general, Kierkegaard seems quite committed to traditional realism in his comments about truth. He cheerfully combines an emphasis on epistemological subjectivity with a realism that may rightly be termed "Greek," since it follows Aristotle's famous claim that "to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true."[13]

If Pojman concedes that Kierkegaard is not a direct volitionalist who thinks of beliefs as always or even usually under the direct control of the will, a major issue still remains. Perhaps indirect control of beliefs is just as objectionable as direct control. If Kierkegaard urges us to believe in Christianity without rational evidence, is he not an irrationalist, whether the belief is formed directly or indirectly?

A response to this charge is beyond the scope of this essay.[14] Here I have set myself the modest task of showing that Kierkegaard does not regard beliefs as under the direct control of the will. He does certainly, however, think that beliefs can be indirectly controlled by the will. To decide whether Kierkegaard's position here is defensible would require a full treatment of the ethics of belief, as well as the situation of the believer. In conclusion, I would

like to sketch the way the situation looks from my perspective. Though I cannot here argue for the view, I can briefly describe a view that takes account of the role of the will in the formation of faith, without seeing faith as involving anything like self-deception.

The typical picture given of Kierkegaard's view of Christian faith is that it requires a "leap of faith." The leap is necessary because Christian faith requires belief in the reality of the incarnation, the "Absolute Paradox," which the critic perceives as a logical contradiction. Assisted by divine grace, the believer manages, through an heroic act of will, to get himself to believe what he knows is absurd, for what is logically contradictory could not possibly occur.

I believe this picture is wrong on every point as an account of what Kierkegaard thought. Kierkegaard cannot think that the paradox of the incarnation can be *known* to be a logical contradiction. It is at most an apparent contradiction, a reality which is so incongruous that human reason cannot understand it.[15] It appears to be a contradiction, not because we know that God and man are mutually exclusive genera, but because our sinfulness makes it impossible for us to understand an act which is a manifestation of pure, unselfish love.

To know that the incarnation is a logical contradiction, we would have to have a clear grasp of what it means to be God and to be human. The message of Christianity, according to Kierkegaard, is that we lack any such knowledge. The truth about God is not something we possess; it must be brought to us by God himself. The person who comes to see the limitations of her own knowledge in this area is a person who can respond to God in faith. This faith is not produced by an act of will on the part of the believer, but rather is a gift of God (PF 62). All that the believer can will to do is to be open to God's gift of faith.

Just as a committed mind-body dualist might be convinced that the paradoxical notion of a thinking brain is a reality if he should encounter one, so the believer might be convinced that the paradoxical notion of the God-man is a reality by a first-person encounter with the God-man.[16] The belief is the result of the encounter with reality, not of some arbitrary act of will. Why then does Kierkegaard regard faith as a leap? An act of will is necessary if the encounter with the God-man is to be a transforming one. The recognition that my own ideas about God are irremediably flawed and that I must accept my dependence on a divine revelation is not easily attained. Such a recognition runs counter to my natural, sinful tendency to assert my own autonomy. If God is to change me, what is required is a humble acceptance

of my need to be changed. Humility is a moral quality which it is quite proper to see as something which must be willed. What is required in the leap of faith is not an immoral attempt to manipulate my beliefs so as to make myself believe what I know is untrue. Rather, I am asked to transform myself so that I can be open to an encounter with the truth which will totally transform my life.[17]

Chapter 18

Where There's a Will There's a Way: Kierkegaard's Theory of Action

One of the most enduring philosophical myths of our time is the view that Kierkegaard was a glorifier of the notion of "radical choice." According to this myth, Kierkegaard, as the father of existentialism, is supposed to have invented a radically new concept of choice in which human agents make their most fundamental and crucial decisions for no reason at all. Such choices must be made without criteria, and they are therefore in a crucial sense arbitrary and absurd.

This myth has been accepted by both friend and foe of Kierkegaard. Probably its most powerful statement comes in Camus' essay "An Absurd Reasoning."[1] The myth, however, is not simply a popular or literary notion but survives in the works of serious philosophers. A recent influential example is Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.

As MacIntyre sees it, Kierkegaard's project in *Either/Or* was to provide a foundation for morality or ethics. The Enlightenment project of giving a rational justification for ethics had failed, and Kierkegaard had clearly seen the failure as irremediable, given the premises of the project. The solution he devised was to abandon the whole notion of a rational justification of morality and substitute for reason a radical act of will as the foundation for morality:

> Kierkegaard and Kant agree in their conception of morality, but Kierkegaard inherits that conception together with an understanding that the project of giving a rational vindication of morality has failed.

> Kant's failure provided Kierkegaard with his starting-point: the act of choice had to be called in to do the work that reason could not do.[2]

MacIntyre correctly sees that *Either/Or* is designed to force the reader to choose between two ways of life. The first volume presents the reader with the papers of an aesthete who lives for the moment and orients himself around the category of satisfaction, albeit in a refined, reflective manner. The second volume contains letters to the aesthete from an older, married man arguing the superiority of a life of ethical commitment. Both volumes are edited by one Victor Eremita; Kierkegaard nowhere appears in his own persona. The reader must decide which kind of life is superior, with no external result or conclusion to influence the choice.

Why should MacIntyre think that Kierkegaard intends this choice to be a radical, criterionless decision? After all, both the aesthete and the married man provide reasons of a sort for their perspectives. MacIntyre's central argument goes like this:

> Suppose that someone confronts the choice between them [the ethical and the aesthetic lives] having as yet embraced neither. He can be offered no *reason* for preferring one to the other. For if a given reason offers support for the ethical way of life—to live in that way will serve the demands of duty or to live in that way will be to accept moral perfection as a goal and so give a certain kind of meaning to one's actions—the person who has not yet embraced either the ethical or the aesthetic still has to choose whether or not to treat this reason as having any force. If it already has force for him, he has already chosen the ethical; which *ex hypothesi* he has not. And so it is also with reasons supportive of the aesthetic.[3]

I believe this argument is weak. An analogy may help us to see this. Suppose that in an ethics class I provide the students with arguments for rival positions on a contemporary issue such as abortion. Their assignment is to analyze the arguments and choose a position. I am careful not to tell the students which position I hold or which arguments I regard as cogent, because I want them to do some thinking on their own.

One might think that in this situation the student who has not yet decided which position to hold "can be offered no reason for preferring one to the other." For when analyzing one of the reasons for holding a position, the student must decide whether that reason has any force. If it does have force, then the student is not truly undecided; if it does not, then the choice appears arbitrary.

The fallacy in this line of thinking lies in the assumption that the student must choose to regard a reason as having force before it has any.

Normally, reasons given for a position strike us as forceful or they do not, and whether they do is not subject to our voluntary control. So a student who has not yet chosen a position on the moral issue in question could conceivably find an argument for a position convincing in making the choice.

Perhaps MacIntyre might respond at this point that the two situations are not strictly analogous. My illustration concerns an intellectual issue where *beliefs* are being formed. Because it is often claimed that beliefs are not under our direct, voluntary control, perhaps no issue of choice really arises here. If the individual finds the argument compelling, his or her belief will follow accordingly. So an uncommitted student may well be swayed by an argument.

The case Kierkegaard is presenting is quite different, MacIntyre might claim. Kierkegaard is analyzing not the formation of a belief, but a decision to live a certain kind of life. And Kierkegaard evidently sees this decision as a free choice for which the individual is responsible. If the decision is determined by reasons then the choice is not really free. The argument could be put in the form of a dilemma. Reasons either determine a choice or they do not. If a choice is determined by reasons then it is not free (given certain controversial incompatibilist assumptions about the nature of freedom and its relation to determinism). If a choice is not determined by reasons then it is arbitrary.

If *that* is the argument then it seems to me that the problem does not lie in Kierkegaard's concept of free choice, but rather in the very notion of free choice. The argument of the previous paragraph is a perfectly general one that implies that every truly free choice is arbitrary and any choice that is performed for a reason is for that reason not free. A full response to the common charge that Kierkegaard urges on us a doctrine of radical choice will therefore require us to give a fuller treatment of Kierkegaard's theory of action *and* to look once more at the whole question of the relationship of reason to free action.

The Aristotelian Understanding of Action

Kierkegaard conducts a running polemic in his authorship against intellectualistic theories of action. He is terribly concerned with the Hegelian doctrine of the "unity of thought and being," mainly because he takes this as eliminating the distinction between thought and action. He wants to argue that to "think that A is good" or to "judge that A is good" is by no means identical with having done A. Nor does doing A follow as a matter of course from such a judgment. (Later I shall attempt to show that this intellectualistic

view of action is by no means absurd and in fact has a vigorous following in contemporary philosophy.)

This polemic of Kierkegaard's has obscured the fact that thought has a significant role to play in his understanding of action. Kierkegaard's theory is really a variation on the traditional Aristotelian picture of action as the result of choice that is itself the product of deliberation.[4] By speaking of the traditional Aristotelian view here I do not mean to refer strictly or even mainly to the views of Aristotle alone, but to a tradition, traceable to Socrates, developed in the Middle Ages and represented in our day by such outstanding philosophers as Donald Davidson and Alan Donagan.[5]

Donagan traces this tradition to the remarks Plato puts in Socrates' mouth in the *Phaedo* (98c–99a), where Socrates criticizes Anaxagoras for claiming to explain the universe as the work of mind, while in fact giving a physical explanation. Such a view is comparable, in Socrates' eyes, to ascribing his being in prison to the processes and states of his "bones and sinews." Socrates claims that the true cause of his being in prison is "that he decided that it was best for me to sit here, and that it is right for me to stay and undergo whatever penalty they order." If his opinions about this were different, his behavior would be different as well, with his bones and sinews following suit.

Aristotle developed this Socratic insight in a powerful way. For Aristotle, the distinctive aspect of human beings lies in our power to represent the world to ourselves in propositional form. Human beings do not merely have immediate desires for an object. We can desire that "Jim have a turn with the toy" or "that Susan move the car out of the driveway." Propositions are the objects of our beliefs, hopes, fears, wishes, and a host of what Bertrand Russell termed "propositional attitudes."

On the Aristotelian view human action begins when a person has a wish, an intellectual appetitive attitude toward some possible state of affairs. This leads to deliberation about how to bring about that possible end, a process that culminates in a choice, which directly explains the action.

Obviously this general account leaves many points of detail open to development in various ways. One crucial point concerns the relationship of the process of deliberation to the choice that issues from it. Kierkegaard himself raises the crucial question in an early journal entry: "In what relationship does the will stand to the last act of understanding; does the will follow necessarily the final cognition of understanding?" (JP 2:1241). If one accepts the Socratic dictum that virtue is knowledge, it will appear reasonable to answer the question by affirming that the will does indeed necessarily follow the "final cognition of understanding." The person who knows what is right

or good, or even correctly believes what is right or good, will do what is right or good. On such a view where the will simply follows the dictates of the intellect, it is tempting to simply eliminate the will altogether and explain human actions as the product of appetitive attitudes and thought. Deliberation leads directly to action.

This view is precisely the intellectualistic theory of action Kierkegaard so vigorously opposes. This intellectualistic theory, however, is merely one version of an Aristotelian theory, and Kierkegaard's opposition to it should not obscure the fact that his own theory is also Aristotelian. Other thinkers have insisted that the last intellectual judgment an individual makes does not necessarily determine an action. It is possible for an individual to will what he or she knows is not the best. The phenomenon of incontinence or weakness of will presents a severe challenge to any intellectualistic theory of action. In what follows I will try to sketch the major outlines of Kierkegaard's understanding of action.

Kierkegaard's Theory of Action

Although Kierkegaard rejects the notion that action follows as a matter of course from reflection, he nevertheless sees reflective deliberation as a necessary condition for action. This is sometimes hard to see because he is continually criticizing the rival view, but even his criticisms of intellectualistic theories clearly presuppose that the intellect plays a crucial role in action. For example, Johannes Climacus, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (whose views on this issue are clearly Kierkegaard's own, I think), says that "the ethical is not merely a knowing; it is also a doing that relates itself to a knowing" (1:160). The assumption is clearly that no one would deny that "the ethical" (which in this context means the arena of responsible action) involves the intellect.

Kierkegaard lived before the day of eliminative materialism, and the idea that human action could be explained apart from the propositional attitudes that are an essential part of our "folk psychology" is foreign to him. The problem for him lies rather in those who think that "knowing" is sufficient to account for action. In this case "the intellectual would swallow the ethical" (CUP 1:338). Against such an intellectual theory Climacus appeals to the Aristotelian concept of movement or change. The realm of reflection is possibility, and the transition from possibility to actuality is never automatic or necessary. It involves a "leap" (1:342). This concept of the leap is obscured if it is immediately brought into connection with the choice to become a Christian. Thus, one should not necessarily associate the leap with the

concept of the absurd. Rather the leap is simply Kierkegaard's general term for decision or choice. In claiming that choice involves a leap he is claiming that choice involves an act of will that is not determined by an act of intellect.

Kierkegaard sees a distinct act of will as necessary to explain action because the intellect has a kind of infinity about it. The intellect cannot bring itself to closure. This can be seen in Climacus's critique in *Postscript* of the problem of "the beginning" in the Hegelian system. As Climacus interprets Hegel, the system begins with a skeptical process of self-reflection that continues until it "cancels itself" (CUP 1:335). From the perspective of Climacus, this means that the system cannot get started at all, as reflection cannot bring itself to a close. This can be seen in the phenomenon of doubt. Doubt cannot bring itself to a close or overcome itself. It is true that underlying doubt is a basic certainty, but this certainty cannot be gained through more doubting because "doubt is continuously deserting this certainty in order to doubt" (1:335n).

This point is crucial to Kierkegaard because his basic objection to Hegel is not to the conceptual relationships that the Hegelian system embodies, but to the notion that such an intellectual enterprise provides the highest task for human existence. It is the Hegelian claim that speculative understanding provides a *telos* for human existence that draws his unrelenting opposition. And this Hegelian claim he sees as logically tied to the intellectualizing of action.

The insight that underlies Kierkegaard's view is clearly expressible in relation to ordinary action. When we are deliberating about an action, from the point of view of deliberation itself there is no way to bring the process to a close. I think about a possible action A and the reasons for performing it or not performing it. I review those reasons and evaluate their relative merits. But how do I know I have reviewed all the relevant evidence which bears on the issue? Should I not think some more? And could I not review my assessment of the relative force of the reasons I have considered? Perhaps I have made a mistake somewhere, and new insights would come with further reflection.

Of course for ordinary, sane people this process of deliberation (sooner or later) is brought to a close. We do not go on thinking about what to do forever. But *how* is it brought to a close? By thinking that I have thought long enough about the problem? But this is itself a conclusion that could be debated. Why is it that we have thought long enough? Surely, it is because there is a difference between thinking and acting, and life consists in acting. To the extent that we want to live and not merely think, we must care enough about some proposed action to close off the process of reflection.

Granted, we run the risk of premature closure and failure to do the right thing. But without running such a risk we cannot act at all.

Action therefore requires something more than deliberation. One might think that this something more would simply be affective. To bring the process of reflection to a close one must want something or care about something badly enough to stop thinking and act. Kierkegaard does think something like this is necessary. We must care in order to act. The notion of a *liberum arbitrium* in the sense of a totally disinterested and indifferent will he denounces as a myth (JP 2:1268). To exist is to be interested, because for Kierkegaard all actuality is an *inter-esse* (CUP 1:314). However, the unique and fascinating thing about human life is that the passions and cares that move us are not simply things that befall us. Kierkegaard rejects the Kantian assumption that "inclinations" are always things for which we are not responsible and therefore are morally neutral.

Certainly we are not responsible for what might be termed our *original impulses*, and many people do live what Kierkegaard termed an *aesthetic life*, which consists simply in trying to satisfy such impulses. It is possible, however, for someone to develop and form these raw materials. In fact, that is just what the ethical life consists in. Climacus cites with approval the words of Plutarch: "Ethical virtue has the passions for its material, reason for its form" (CUP 1:161–62n). The fact that we are responsible for the formation of our passions means that something like the will is essential to understand human action. Not all passions are originally present; many of them are formed precisely through repeated action. If we are responsible for the formation of our passions, then we must have some freedom with respect to the actions that form those passions. Our actions are not simply the inevitable products of forces acting within us. Thus Kierkegaard consistently attributes to humans the power to will or not to will an action. In fact, he comes close to simply identifying action with an act of will.[6] "The real action is not the external act, but an internal decision in which the individual puts an end to the mere possibility and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it" (1:339). This theme of the true action as an inner action is one of the more well-known and interesting elements of Kierkegaard's understanding of action, and it deserves closer examination.

The Depreciation of Results

Johannes Climacus claims that the moral significance of an action lies wholly in what is intended by the agent. In the final analysis all a person can do is will what is right; the results are really in God's hands.[7] This Kantian

depreciation of the consequences of action actually leads Climacus to assert that a truly ethical personality would choose, if it were possible, to be ignorant about the consequences of his actions. He would not thereby be tempted to desert the purity of ethical resolve for the delights of "world-historical significance," which for Climacus is not a thing that can be gained merely through ethical striving (CUP 1:135). "The true ethical enthusiasm lies in willing to the utmost limits of one's powers, but at the same time being so uplifted in divine jest as never to think about the outcome. As soon as the will begins to look covetously at the outcome, the individual begins to become immoral" (1:135).

These claims of Climacus appear exaggerated at best and outrageous at worst, on first reflection. It hardly seems possible seriously to will a certain end and at the same time be so indifferent as to whether that end is realized that one would choose to be ignorant of the results of the action. And it certainly seems strange to say that the results of one's action are merely a matter of fortune or providence. If there were not some regular connections between willing a certain end and achieving certain results, it would in fact be impossible to act at all, as such causal regularities seem to be one of the things we presuppose in acting.

Although there is certainly a touch of hyperbole in Climacus's discussion on these points, a serious and defensible point is being made. Of course, a person could not be regularly ignorant of the results of his action and go on acting. Hence, it is charitable to read a touch of irony in Climacus's remark that a truly ethical person would choose to be ignorant in this way *if* it were possible. And, of course, a person would not will to move his arm were there not a regular causal connection between his so willing and his arm going up. (This is mainly because the agent must believe that there is a causal connection between the two in order to will the action.) Climacus could hardly be ignorant of such a fact.

Still, it is literally true that a person cannot by willing guarantee that he will not be struck by paralysis at the very moment he wills to lift his arm, however unlikely this may be. To be reminded of this fact is to face one's finitude squarely and recognize that one is not God. In the final analysis what happens in the world depends on many factors which are not within our control. This is particularly true when we move away from simple bodily movements to those external happenings that are connected to our bodily actions by remote causal chains.

Climacus actually gives an example of an action that helps make his real meaning plainer. In a variation of the good Samaritan story, he describes a repentant Levite who first passes by the poor wounded man, then later

regrets his decision and hastens back to give assistance. Unfortunately he arrives too late; the good Samaritan has already taken care of the victim. Climacus then raises the question as to whether the Levite has performed an action and answers it affirmatively: "Certainly he had acted, and yet he had no opportunity to act in the external sense" (CUP 1:339). Both the question and the answer seem odd, because it seems so obvious that the man had acted, and that he had done something "in the external sense"; namely, returned to the scene of the crime where he had initially passed by the victim. Clearly, by external action Climacus does not merely mean "some physical change in one's body or elsewhere in the world." In saying that the repentant Levite had no opportunity to act in the external sense he means that the Levite had no chance to effect a meaningful or significant change, one with "world-historical significance." Here it seems quite reasonable to remind ourselves that such changes cannot be regarded as results that are solely in our power, and that the temptation to take a moral shortcut to produce a desirable result is indeed a moral temptation.

I am discussing this point at some length, not merely because it is an interesting one in its own right, but because it sheds light on Kierkegaard's general view of action. Why is it that the true action must be seen as "inner?" I believe that the answer is fairly clear. Kierkegaard shares the standard intuition that underlies libertarianism: persons are only truly responsible for that which is within their power. To the extent that results are not within our power, to that extent we are not responsible. This means that Kierkegaard must and does reject determinism, including "soft-determinist," compatibilist versions. Persons are responsible only for what they have the power to do or not to do; an act must be completely within our power if we are to be correctly ascribed moral responsibility for it.

In an interesting way, Harry Frankfurt calls attention to the importance of these intuitions in an attempt to call them into question.[8] Frankfurt raises doubts about the libertarian claim that in the case of a free action I must be able to say truthfully, "I could have done otherwise." This principle is in turn rooted in the libertarian intuition, shared by Kierkegaard as we have seen, that we are responsible only for what is in our power. Frankfurt constructs counterexamples to the "could have done otherwise" principle, which he calls the "principle of alternate possibilities," along the following lines. Suppose that Joe hates James and is planning to shoot him. Though Joe does not know it, a third party, Jerry, also wants James dead. Jerry is delighted to find out about Joe's intentions. On the off-chance that Joe should change his mind, however, Jerry has a contingency plan. In that case he will cause Joe to shoot James, and there is nothing Joe can do to prevent this.

Suppose that Joe does not change his mind and in fact shoots James. Surely we would say in that case that he did so of his own free will, and that he is responsible for the act. Yet he could not have done otherwise, because if he had not freely decided to shoot James, then Jerry would have caused him to do so. So he did not have the power to shoot James *or not* to shoot James.

I believe that what these Frankfurt-type counterexamples show is not that the principle of alternate possibilities is false. A free, responsible action is one where an individual had the power to perform the action or not. Rather, they show that, strictly speaking, Kierkegaard is correct when he insists that the true action lies in the inner resolution of the will. Regardless of what Jerry does, Joe does have the power to freely will to shoot James or not. (If he lacks this power, then he does indeed lack freedom.) He does not, in this case, have power over the external result. Regardless of what he decides to do, Joe will in fact shoot James. But so long as Jerry does not control Joe's will, Joe can determine whether the shooting of James is a free act for which Joe is to be held responsible. If Jerry does control Joe's will, Joe is not responsible for the action. Jerry can cause Joe to shoot James, but he cannot cause him to shoot James of his own free will.

Weakness of Will

The significance of a concept of will in the theory of action can be seen clearly by comparing Kierkegaard's account of weakness of will with that of an influential twentieth-century account of the phenomenon. Donald Davidson, in an essay entitled "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?"[9] gives an explanation of the phenomenon that Kierkegaard would certainly regard as entailing an intellectualistic view of action. Davidson holds that one must have a reason for any action, because actions are events caused by reasons. The problem in cases of weakness of will is not that we have a reason for acting as we do, but that we have better reasons for not doing so, or for doing something else.

This is possible, says Davidson, because there are two types of reasons to be distinguished. In the process of deliberation, reasons are prima facie reasons. It occurs to us that x is a good reason for doing A, but of course we realize that y may be an even better reason for not doing A. As a result of reflection, we try to make the best possible overall assessment of what it is best for us to do, "all things considered." The difficulty is that we never in fact consider all things. Judgments of this sort must be regarded as conditional and hypothetical, for we realize that further reflection might modify

our judgment. They have a form like this: "Insofar as I have considered the relevant evidence available to me, it looks like I should do A."

Davidson points out, however, that one cannot deduce from this judgment that A *is* in fact the best thing to do. Action requires a different kind of judgment, a judgment that A is the thing to do, where this judgment is an "all-out" or unconditional judgment. Therefore persons who act against their better judgment have not necessarily acted from contradictory premises. Such persons are irrational, says Davidson, because in inductive reasoning it is rational to rely on the total evidence available.[10] It is possible, however, without contradiction to hold that A seems the best action, insofar as I have considered all the relevant evidence available to me, and also to judge unconditionally that some alternative action B is superior to A.

From Kierkegaard's perspective this discussion is interesting in several respects. First, Davidson's discussion illuminates and supports Kierkegaard's claim that the intellect by itself has a kind of infinity that prevents closure. In another essay, Davidson puts this point very nicely: "It is a reason for acting that the action is believed to have some desirable characteristic, but the fact that the action is performed represents a further judgment that the desirable characteristic was enough to act on—that other considerations did not outweigh it."[11] This further judgment, however, cannot be conclusively demonstrated. The fact that I want something sweet, and that a particular food is sweet cannot deductively warrant that I should eat the food in question, because "there are *endless* circumstances under which I would not eat something sweet, and I cannot begin to foresee them all."[12]

This is precisely Kierkegaard's point when he claims that reason alone cannot lead to action. What *does* enable an individual to make the transition from such a conditional (insofar as he has considered the matter) judgment, to action with its all-out, unconditional character? For Kierkegaard this is precisely where the will comes into play.

How does Davidson answer this question? In cases of rational or continent action, his view seems to be that a person's reasons simply cause the action in a straightforward way. (Though, of course, he is careful to insist that this does not mean that any causal laws connect the reason *as a reason* to the action.) Hence, in these cases his view looks intellectualistic to Kierkegaard. It is not of course that Davidson wants to reduce action to thought, but that the transition from thought to action occurs as a matter of course.

But is this really so? After all, Davidson recognizes that there are cases of incontinent action, where a person's overall judgment does not determine his or her action. So it seems that reasons do not lead automatically to action.

What does bridge the gap between the tentative, never-to-be-completed process of reflection and action in those cases? Here, Davidson's answer is that no rational answer can be given:

> Why would anyone ever perform an action when he thought that, everything considered, another action would be better? If this is a request for a psychological explanation, then the answers will no doubt refer to the interesting phenomena familiar from most discussions of incontinence: self-deception, overpowering desires, lack of imagination, and the rest. But if the question is read, what is the agent's reason for doing *a* when he believes it would be better, all things considered, to do another thing, then the answer must be: for this, the agent has no reason.[13]

In cases of weakness of will, then, Davidson says no explanation can be given of how an agent moves from a process of deliberation to action. Or, to be more precise, no *rational* explanation can be given, only an explanation in terms of nonrational causes. Actually, given Davidson's view that reasons are neurophysiological events and that the ultimate causal laws in this area connect intentions as physiological events to bodily movements, the ultimate explanation must surely come from the neurophysiologist.[14] And this explanation is certainly nonrational.

But that seems to me to imply that in these cases the agent is not really responsible for the action. If no reason can be given why reasons are not effective in moving me to action in incontinent cases, except that nonrational causes block their operation, then it is hard to see how the agent can be held responsible for cases of continent action, either. Surely one is just fortunate that in those cases one's reasons are causally effective, because there is no indication that one has effective control over the nonrational causes that sometimes block the efficacy of reasons. Sometimes reasons cause one to do things but they do not do so *qua* reasons.

When the concept of will enters the picture, the situation is quite different. One can acknowledge the force of reasons and also the power of nonrational causes. Agents are responsible for their actions, however, only to the extent that they can through their will choose to act or not to act on those reasons, will to oppose or not to oppose those nonrational causes.

Putting Mystery in its Place

I believe we now have the resources for understanding why the interpretation of Kierkegaard as a proponent of radical choice is so appealing, and why it is nonetheless mistaken. In Kierkegaard's view, actions are neither arbitrary nor determined. They are not arbitrary, because agents can well have reasons

for their actions. They are not determined, because reasons can provide a basis for action without causally determining that action. Besides having a reason for an action, an agent must will an action to perform it, and such an act of will does not follow automatically from an intellectual judgment that the action is worth doing.

Nevertheless it is easy to see why Kierkegaard's view looks like a doctrine of radical choice when looked at from a certain perspective; namely, the perspective of the determinist. Kierkegaard's view of action makes actions appear arbitrary and capricious to the determinist, simply because Kierkegaard's theory is a version of libertarianism, and this is how libertarian theories of action always look to determinists. And we must admit that there is something mysterious about human action if libertarianism is true, a mystery that is named but not dispelled by such notions as "agent causation." In saying that human action is genuinely free, libertarians are saying that humans have the power to perform an action or not to do so, even given the past and present conditions of the agent.

This means that agents really are "first causes," at least first causes of the "relative" type Johannes Climacus discusses in *Philosophical Fragments* (76). Nothing in the past guarantees a free action; it is in no way a necessary unfolding of processes already in motion. Such an action really does bring something new into the world, and it seems appropriate to indicate this by designating the process by which the action comes into being as a "leap."

To the determinist, however, this is simply reveling in mystery, an admission that free actions cannot be explained. The argument of course begs the question, because the only explanation that will satisfy the determinist is precisely a deterministic one, and the libertarian will insist that this kind of explanation will simply eliminate freedom. Kierkegaard himself, for example, through his pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, denies that sin can be explained by any science (CA 39). The reason for this is surely that sin involves free, responsible action, and such actions cannot finally be explained as the necessary outcome of preexisting conditions.

I am under no illusion that I have resolved the issue in dispute between libertarians and determinists here. My purpose is to understand Kierkegaard's theory of action, and I have succeeded if I have made action on Kierkegaard's view no more mysterious or arbitrary than action is in the views of such philosophers as Thomas Reid, Roderick Chisholm, and Peter Van Inwagen.

It is worth noting that the banishment of mystery carries a price, however. We saw earlier that in Davidson's theory of action, it looks as if no explanation can be given of why reasons are sometimes effective and sometimes

not, except in terms of nonrational causes. Either we are left with the unsolved mystery of how we move from hypothetical, open-ended deliberation to all-out action or else the mystery is dispelled by denying that reasons have power to move us as reasons. Whether we are moved by reasons depends not on ourselves but on nonrational causes that affect us. To me this avoiding of mystery seems a high price to pay, for it is tantamount to abandoning agency in any really significant sense. And if we avoid this explanation that dispels mystery, the mystery of will seems preferable to simply saying that we can give no account of how the transition to action is made.

That we can and do move from reasoning about what is good, all things considered, to action seems to me to cry out for an explanation. It is not the sort of thing that just happens. That there should be something mysterious and unexplained in human agency does not appear strange, however, because it certainly appears that it is precisely its originative character that makes human agency so distinctive.

Can a Free Action Be Moved by Reasons?

There is one other respect in which actions on the Kierkegaardian model may appear arbitrary. I have argued that Kierkegaardian free choices may be done for reasons. But are those reasons really *reasons*? Does Kierkegaard really think that rational considerations could justify a choice, even if we agree that this could be done without determining the choice?

The problem is a genuine one, I think, because Kierkegaard does not regard deliberation about actions as a neutral, disinterested affair. By contrast, on reading Davidson's account of practical reasoning, one almost gets the feeling that practical deliberation is something that could be carried on by a computer. Weakness of will is irrational because it violates a principle of good inductive reasoning, which is to base one's judgments on the total evidence available to one.

From a Kierkegaardian perspective, this is naive. It assumes that the evidence is "out there" in some objective way, independent of my inclinations and passions. But of course this is not so. A typical reason for doing some action is that the action will satisfy some desire of mine. Though some philosophers may have assumed that my desires are objective occurrences over which I have no control, this is certainly not true of many of them. I can at least control many desires indirectly over time, and this is even more true of those long-term caring involvements Kierkegaard termed "passions." So very often the "evidence" that I should pursue a certain course of action,

in the sense of the reason why I should perform the action, is something that is affected by my emotional life.

It is thus even more evident why "reason" by itself is powerless to motivate action. In the practical sphere reason "by itself" is an abstraction; it does not exist. It is analogous to that "pure thinking" that Climacus denounces as a mirage in *Postscript*.

So, are the proponents of radical choice right after all? If the notion of an objective reason that could justify choice is a mirage, then actions appear arbitrary in the end. Or so it would seem if we are classical foundationalists in our epistemology.

I believe that the temptation to throw in the towel and admit that choices are ultimately arbitrary stems from residual classical foundationalist strains in our everyday epistemology: surely for a reason to be a good one it must be one that could be justified before a neutral, objective audience. Reasons tainted by subjectivity could not be good reasons.

To expose this line of thinking, I believe, is to call it into question. The history of twentieth-century epistemology and philosophy of science suggests that the ideal of a reason untainted by any whiff of commitment and subjectivity is a myth. But this lack does not prevent us from reasoning and holding justified beliefs, and it is not at all evident that it should prevent us from acting in justified ways.

The way Alasdair MacIntyre sets up his case against Kierkegaard in *After Virtue* suggests to me that a touch of this residual classical foundationalism may be at work in his account despite the fact that he seems to reject classical foundationalism in his concluding chapter. He claims that the reasons given by Judge William for the ethical life in volume 2 of *Either/Or* are no good because they will be acceptable only to one who already is committed enough to the ethical life to feel its attractiveness. Now the judge certainly gives many arguments that he hopes will appeal to the aesthete who is the author of volume 1. For example, he argues that marriage is superior to the casual love affair, even when judged on aesthetic criteria. You might say that marriage actually realizes the ends that are implicit in the aesthetic romantic project. The judge even gives an argument against the aesthete, focusing on the unity of the personality over time, which is remarkably like an argument given by MacIntyre himself.[15]

It is possible, of course, that this argument will fail to be convincing even if it is a good argument. It may well be that the aesthete will not be convinced because he is determined to remain an aesthete. Does this fact show that the judge's reasons are not good reasons? I think not. What would an argument have to accomplish to provide a good reason for choice? Must it be

able to convince anyone and everyone? If so, no philosophical argument of any substance is a good argument. The idea that an argument must be convincing to anyone, regardless of the assumptions and values they bring to bear on their evaluation of it, seems to me to be one that would be attractive only to a classical foundationalist. For such a foundationalist can at least put forward as an ideal that people should be able to set aside all assumptions and commitments and think in a neutral, objective way about the question. On the assumption that people are capable of at least approximating this ideal, rational arguments should in principle be convincing to all who enter the arena of thought.

If, however, we reject the notion that reason requires the jettisoning of all commitments and values, and instead explore the idea that reasoning is in part an attempt to test such values by developing their implications and seeing how well they function when integrated into our theoretical and practical lives, then the picture looks different. There surely must be something between the radical, arbitrary choice and the algorithmic decision-process that a properly programmed computer can execute. Somewhere in that expanse lies the Kierkegaardian leap, which can indeed be informed by reasons, but must in the end be created by passionate willing.

PART SIX

Conclusion

Chapter 19

Where Can Kierkegaard Take Us?

This book contains a detailed defense against the most common accusation against Kierkegaard: that he was an irrationalist whose fideism amounts to a desertion of reason. This charge is made with respect to a number of areas, such as the claim that Kierkegaard is an irrationalist in his treatment of the incarnation as a "contradiction" that reason must heroically embrace, or the claim that Kierkegaard is an irrationalist in his account of the ethical life, an account which makes ethical obligations subject to the whims of an arbitrary deity. I have tried in this book to respond to such criticisms in detail and to show that they reflect a caricature of what Kierkegaard actually thought, though it is a caricature that is all too common in textbooks.

Such a defense of Kierkegaard is worth the trouble, I have argued, because Kierkegaard has some important things to teach us. His fundamental message to the Christian Church is that we must beware of the seductive power of "Christendom." The Church must always recognize that to be a Christian is to be in tension with "the world," and that a genuine commitment is required to become a Christian. No one becomes a Christian simply by becoming enculturated, no matter how genteel and "civilized" the culture may appear to be.

His fundamental message to the world outside the Church is, I believe, that the "evidentialist" challenge to faith that has so vexed religious apologists since the Enlightenment has been misdiagnosed. The contemporary world has difficulty believing, not because humans have become smarter and

more rational, but because our imaginations have become impoverished and our moral and spiritual lives shallow and superficial. We do not need more evidence for faith, and the attempt to "sell" Christian faith to those who are not in a position even to understand it will inevitably falsify it. Rather, the fundamental need is for human persons to become more human. We must renew the ancient quest to find out who we are. Only then will we be in a position to hear and respond to the gospel.

In this concluding essay I want to think, in a brief and suggestive manner, about where Kierkegaard might take us if we decided to make him a guide for our contemporary pilgrimage. Once we get beyond the textbook caricatures and are able to read Kierkegaard's texts anew, what kinds of questions might we find ourselves asking, and what kinds of answers might Kierkegaard inspire us to explore? Without trying to be exhaustive, here are a number of areas where more attention to Kierkegaard would be salutary.

First, with respect to basic issues in epistemology, Kierkegaard is one of those thinkers who can help us find a middle way between dogmatism and skepticism, to use a phrase beloved by my undergraduate teacher and mentor, Arthur Holmes. Kierkegaard knows as well as any postmodern thinker that we are finite, historically situated beings. Our identities are shaped not simply by reason, but by our passions, what we care about as emotional beings. Furthermore, as a Christian thinker, Kierkegaard is well aware of human sinfulness and the ways our rebellion against God distorts our understanding of God, ourselves, and our world. Nevertheless, despite these cognitive limitations, which make it impossible for us to assume that we ever attain "the view from nowhere" or see the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, Kierkegaard never doubts that there is a truth to be known, a way that the world really is, defined by God's point of view. Though that point of view is not ours, knowing there is such a perspective inoculates us against the dangers of relativism and antirealism. Furthermore, Kierkegaard does not despair of our ability to find a truth for which we can live and die. Though we do not have the godlike cognitive powers some philosophers think we have, God makes it possible for us to grasp what we need to grasp to live fully human lives. Our passions are not merely distorting filters that screen us from reality; properly formed passions can enable us to grasp the truth we need to know. The quest for knowledge cannot be separated from the quest to become the right kind of person.

This makes Kierkegaard a key figure in the developing "virtue epistemology," which is once more paying attention to the characteristics of the knower instead of simply the nature of knowledge. Some have rejected the

idea of reading Kierkegaard as "virtue theorist," either in ethics or epistemology, because of his well-known claim that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith (SUD 82). In this quote from *The Sickness unto Death*, however, Anti-Climacus by *virtue* has in mind a kind of autonomous moral striving. His point is that such autonomous striving in which a person declares independence from God, far from being the opposite of sin, is itself a form of sin. If we think of virtue as an excellence, however, a new quality that makes it possible for a person to become what God intends, it is evident that faith is itself a virtue, a virtue that in turn makes possible a host of other virtues, especially love and hope, but also patience, wisdom, and honesty. Kierkegaard is thus a legitimate inspiration for virtue theory, both in ethics and in epistemology.

A second area where Kierkegaard remains a fruitful conversation partner is his firm grasp of the essential role that authority plays in the Christian life. Kierkegaard sees more clearly than most modern theologians that what is essential for Christianity is not merely believing what God has revealed, but believing what God has revealed because God has revealed it. What is primary is our relationship to God rather than our assent to doctrines. The doctrines must be believed because of our love and trust in God, which leads us to believe and act on the basis of what has been revealed.

Certain kinds of apologetic arguments thus subvert what they intend to defend, by undermining the basis of authentic Christian faith. If I say that Christianity is true because it largely coincides with the "religion of reason" (Kant) or because it can be philosophically shown to be "the absolute religion" (Hegel), or because of its therapeutic benefits (the contemporary culture informed by pop psychology), then I have severed genuine Christian faith from its life-giving source: trust in the God who created us and has become human to redeem us. Against such attempts to substitute reason for faith, Kierkegaard reminds us that the Biblical story of salvation is not a story that we humans could have invented; and even when we hear about it, it retains its power to shock and disturb us. Rather than minimizing this characteristic, Kierkegaard insists that we should recognize that this paradoxicalness is one sign that we have discovered a genuine revelation from God.

A third area where Kierkegaard continues to be helpful concerns historical criticism of the Bible. Kierkegaard was acutely aware of the implications of the new "higher criticism" that had emerged from Germany. That kind of critical scholarship shows no signs of abating, as evidenced by the continuing "quest for the historical Jesus." While in no way impugning genuine historical inquiry or preventing critical scrutiny of texts, Kierkegaaard raises the

kinds of philosophical questions about the value and limits of such historical inquiry that some historical critics fail to ask.

I have argued in this book that Kierkegaard actually underplays the value of historical inquiry, and that his extreme claims about the irrelevance of such historical inquiry for faith cannot stand. Even if his more extreme views are moderated, he still mounts a strong challenge to the assumption that the convictions of faith that have historical content do or should arise simply from historical scholarship. He presents a challenge to the claim that the believer's convictions should be controlled by the tentative conclusions that scholarship can reach, and also challenges the claim made by many historical scholars that their own conclusions are not shaped by faith. To echo the title of one of my own earlier books, Kierkegaard helps us see both that the Church's Christ must be historical, but also that the historians' Jesus will always reflect the faith of the historians. He thus blocks the road towards any facile separation between the "Christ of faith" and the "Jesus of history," while recognizing the role faith must play in coming to convictions about historical events that are not just "things that happened a long time ago" but that are decisive for how I live my life.

Finally, I think that Kierkegaard is a figure who remains important for Christian ethics. I have noted above the value of Kierkegaard for virtue theory. However, Kierkegaard also has a firm grasp of the importance of divine authority for Christian ethics, and he thus is a major source for the revival of divine-command theories of moral obligation.[1] Here Kierkegaard can help us see how an ethic of duty can be linked to an ethic of virtue. Christian ethics cannot do without either, for the Bible shows a concern for the kinds of people we are to become, not simply the kinds of actions permitted. The kinds of people we are to become, however, cannot be divorced from our relation to God. The biblical picture of that relationship, in both the Old and New Testaments, gives a central place to divine commands that a loving God has given to his creatures. Yahweh tells his people that he is the Lord their God who has brought them out of Egypt, and thus they must keep his commandments. Jesus tells his disciples that if they love him they will keep his commandments. Kierkegaard helps us to see the role that divine commands should play in a developed Christian ethic.

Many more items could be added to this list, and doubtless other critics of Kierkegaard would put different items at the top than I have. I certainly do not want to suggest that one can simply enlist Kierkegaard as an ally in one's favorite cause. On the contrary, a fresh reading of Kierkegaard is generally going to cause troubles—helpful troubles, but troubles nonetheless. As

his pseudonym Johannes Climacus famously said, his calling is to create difficulties everywhere. If my own readings of Kierkegaard clear away some of the fog of misunderstanding and enable others to encounter the text in a fresh, provocative, and even troubling way, then I will consider my efforts fruitful indeed.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. See Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's* Concluding Unscientific Postscript (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1996); and John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
2. For example, see James Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense," in *Pursuits of Reason* (ed. T. Cohen, P. Guyer, and H. Putnam; Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 195–224.
3. See Robert Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986).
4. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968); *Escape from Reason* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968).
5. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1955). See especially the first essay in the volume, "An Absurd Reasoning," 3–48.
6 . Theologian Thomas Oden has recently argued for this same claim in *The Humor of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
7. Brand Blanshard, "Kierkegaard on Faith," in Gill, ed, *Essays on Kierkegaard*, 118.
8. For more on this see my *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Chapter 2

1. James D. Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
2. Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 6.
3. Poole, *Kierkegaard*, 7.
4. Poole, *Kierkegaard*, 9.
5. William Alston, "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Real World," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 52 no. 6 (1979): 779–80.
6. Alvin Plantinga, "How to Be an Anti-realist," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56, no. 1 (1982), 48.
7. Hilary Putnam, "Realism and Reason," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 50, no. 6 (1977), 485.
8. There is a big debate about the status of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. Though I have a well-developed position on this issue, and I side wholeheartedly with those who affirm the significance and autonomy of the pseudonyms, in this chapter I shall not deal with the issue, though I do in chapter 4. Since the views of Kierkegaard are often discussed with reference to things his pseudonyms say, it is appropriate to evaluate those discussions as discussions of Kierkegaard. In this chapter Kierkegaard will simply be a term for the figure speaking in the literature under discussion, which means that in the case of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* the views under discussion are actually those of the pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus. I do not want to assume that the views of Climacus or the Kierkegaard I am discussing are the same as those of the historical Kierkegaard either, but neither do I wish to assume in advance that they must be different from the actual views of Kierkegaard.
9. Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in his *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (vol. 1 of *Philosophical Papers*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 188. This claim is echoed in volume 2 of Rorty's *Philosophical Papers* as well; see "Heidegger, Contingency and Pungmatism," in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 32.
10. See my *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's* Philosophical Fragments (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) and *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript*: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983; repr., Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 1999).
11. Poole, *Kierkegaard*, 7.
12. Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 138. Italics are in the original.
13. See Ronald Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), for an account of the many similarities between Kant and Kierkegaard, as well as an intriguing but speculative suggestion that Kierkegaard suppressed any acknowledgment of his indebtedness to Kant.

14. See chapter 17 in this volume for a fuller argument for this claim.
15. The accusation Kierkegaard himself raises as a problem is pressed forcefully in Louis Mackey, "The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard's Ethics," in his *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Kierkegaard and Postmodernism; Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 141–59.
16. Really, of course, it is the pseudonym Johannes Climacus who says this. See n. 8 above.
17. Kierkegaard's view here can be compared with the view of Thomas Reid and other philosophers that humans acquire such concepts as those of "power" and "cause" from a first-person perspective. We know what it means for something to be a cause because we are conscious of our own causal activity. The difference is that Kierkegaard does not wish to say that "existence" is a concept. When we think of a tiger as existing, the concept of a tiger has not changed. Nevertheless, our attitude toward the concept does change, and Kierkegaard wants to claim that our sense of what this attitude involves is acquired by existing.
18. Kierkegaard's claim is interestingly similar to a well-known claim of Einstein: "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality." From "Geometry and Experience," an expanded form of an address to the Prussian Academy of Sciences, Berlin, 27 January 1921, quoted from *Einstein's Sidelights on Relativity* (trans. G. B. Jeffery and W. Perrett; London: Methuen & Co., 1922). I found the quote in Henry Margenau, "Einstein's Conception of Reality," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist* (ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp; 3d ed.; Library of Living Philosophers 7; La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1970, 243–68, here 250.
19. A good example of the way the ideal of correspondence with reality is assumed as an ideal can be found in *Philosophical Fragments*, where Hegelian accounts of history as "necessary" are criticized on the grounds that the character of what is known (history as involving contingency) is altered by the knowing, rather than by the knower seeking to make his thought correspond to reality. See PF 81–82.
20. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 176. See William Alston's discussion of this point in "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Real World," 780–86.
21. See Merold Westphal, "Christian Philosophers and the Copernican Revolution," in Evans and Westphal, eds. *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, 161–79.
22. In *Postscript* Kierkegaard emphasizes the impossibility of universal doubt. Doubt is a task that requires effort; doubting universally would require an infinite effort that an existing human being could never realize (CUP 1:318). Very similar themes can be found in *Philosophical Fragments*, where it is emphasized that skepticism is not a natural or necessary result of thought, but is grounded in the will (PF 82–85).

Chapter 3

1. William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," in his *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1956), 145–83.
2. Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1994), 11.
3. See Søren Kierkegaard, *From the Papers of One Still Living, in Early Polemical Writings* (ed. and trans. Julia Watkin; Kierkegaard's Writings 1; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 53–102.
4. See, for example, CUP 1:309, 311, where we are told repeatedly that "Greek philosophy was not absentminded," that "the Greek philosopher was an existing person, and he did not forget this," and that "every Greek thinker was essentially also a passionate thinker."
5. James, "Dilemma of Determinism," 151.
6. James, "Dilemma of Determinism," 158.
7. James, "Dilemma of Determinism," 152.
8. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (ed. and rev. trans. Lewis White Beck; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 8–9.
9. Kant, *Prolegomena*, 25.
10. Kant, *Prolegomena*, 4–5.
11. Kant, *Prolegomena*, 76–77.
12. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Norman Kemp Smith; New York: St. Martin's, 1965), 10.
13. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 10.
14. Kant, *Prolegomena*, 25.
15. Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1984), 139. Of course Scruton's claim here is doubly wrong. Not only is he wrong in saying that rational theology is unthinkable, as I here argue. He is also wrong to say it is unbelievable for Kant. For Kant rational theology cannot be science; it cannot be known. It can and should be believed, however.
16. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 327.
17. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 327.
18. Kant says repeatedly that speculative metaphysics is not a mere mistake but a kind of "natural illusion" rooted in the nature of reason itself, since reason cannot avoid concerning itself with the ideas in question. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, 7, 300, and 327.
19. Immanuel Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" in Critique of Practical Reason *and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy* (ed. and trans. Lewis White Beck; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 293–305, here 302.
20. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 210–11 and many other passages.
21. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 530–31.
22. Hans Vaihinger is of course famous for developing such a reading of Kant. See his *The Philosophy of As If* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1924).
23. Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith* (London: BBC, 1985), 154.

24. In this chapter I shall assume that the writings of Johannes Climacus, though expressed in the "voice" of a non-Christian, nevertheless represent an accurate picture of Christianity as seen by such an individual, a picture that is consistent with Kierkegaard's own views. This assumption is not uncontroversial, and anyone who finds it dubious may treat the view I discuss as "Kierkegaardian" (found in Kierkegaard's writings) rather than Kierkegaard's. For more on the relation of Kierkegaard to Johannes Climacus, see my Kierkegaard's *Fragments* and *Postscript*, 6–32; and also my *Passionate Reason*, 2–12.
25. Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," 175–96, here 188. This claim is echoed in volume 2 of Rorty's *Philosophical Papers* as well; see *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, 27–49, esp. 32.
26. Putnam, "Realism and Reason," 485. This is quoted approvingly by Alston in his own presidential address, "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Real World," 780.
27. I wish to thank David Hoekema for drawing this objection to my attention.
28. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 4. There are plenty of passages where Goodman could be taken as denying outright the existence of any objective reality. For example, on p. 6, he claims that we construct worlds not out of nothing, but out of other worlds that are clearly constructed as well.
29. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 176.
30. See Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), for an excellent example.
31. Some of the classic texts for Reformed epistemology can be found in *Faith and Rationality* (ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). It is, I think, a different question whether or not there might be evidence that is not describable as evidence according to classical foundationalist conceptions of evidence. See, for example, William J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), in which he argues that there might be evidence for religious truth that can only be recognized as good evidence when the right kind of "passions" are present to the individual.
32. See, for example, PF 42, where it is urged that in the case of Socrates's arguments for God, faith is the basis of the arguments.

Chapter 4

1. Roger Poole, "The Unknown Kierkegaard: Twentieth-Century Receptions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48–75. See particularly 57–66.
2. Poole, "Unknown Kierkegaard," 59–60.
3. Poole, "Unknown Kierkegaard," 59.
4. There is, however, currently a program of "Religious Studies" that is housed in the department of classical and near Eastern studies.

5. Poole singles out my own work as an especially bad example of "blunt reading," taking special exception to the subtitle of my book *Passionate Reason*, which is "Making Sense of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*." Poole apparently takes the subtitle to imply that Kierkegaard's book is confused and needs to be "rescued." My book, however, is a sustained argument that *Fragments* is philosophically clear and coherent, though the philosophical content is packaged in a humorous and ironical form; some contemporary readers may need help, but that is more a comment on today's educational system than a critique of Kierkegaard. Curiously, Poole praises Robert Roberts's *Faith, Reason, and History* to the skies, as a great contrast to my work. If he had read both my book and Roberts's book carefully, he would have learned that Roberts and I are close friends and shared many ideas in the writing of both books. While Roberts and I certainly disagree on some points, the two books are in basic and broad agreement.
6. Poole, "Unknown Kierkegaard," 62.
7. Poole, *Kierkegaard*, 9.
8. Poole, *Kierkegaard*, 7.
9. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 151.
10. Probably the clearest of these articles of Conant is "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense," 195–224.
11. Strictly speaking, Conant makes his claim only about *Postscript* and does not really discuss *Fragments*. Yet in support of his interpretation of *Postscript* as deeply ironical, he cites a journal passage from *Postscript*, mentioning the "incessant activity of irony," that is explicitly about *Fragments*. (See "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense," 215–16.) This leads me to think that Conant sees the two Climacus books as continuous.
12. Niels Thulstrup, "Commentator's Introduction," in *Philosophical Fragments* (trans. David Swenson, revised trans. and commentary Howard V. Hong; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), xlv–xcvii, here lxxxv.
13. Thulstrup, "Commentator's Introduction," xlv.
14. Thulstrup, "Commentator's Introduction," lxxxv.
15. Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
16. See Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 105–23, for a brilliant discussion of Swift's work.
17. Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 82–86.
18. Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 47–86.
19. The story was not published as a book but as a "tract" by InterVarsity Press. See George Mavrodes, *The Salvation of Zachary Baumkletterer* (Madison, Wisc.: InterVarsity, 1977).
20. Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 81.
21. For my take on these see my *Passionate Reason*, 18–25.
22. John 14:6 NIV.
23. Thulstrup, "Commentator's Introduction," lxxxv.

24. See John Lippitt, *Humor and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), esp. ch. 8.
25. For an excellent introduction to the various forms of irony, see D. C. Muecke, *Irony* (London: Methuen & Co. 1970).
26. Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 240–41.
27. Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 8–9.

Chapter 5

1. The typology is borrowed from John Morreall's excellent book *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1983). Morreall discusses these as theories of laughter, however, while I wish to restrict my discussion to humor.
2. Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (ed. W. Molesworth; London: Bohn, 1840), 4:1–76. Quoted in Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 5.
3. Albert Rapp, *The Origins of Wit and Humor* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1951), 21.
4. See Anthony Ludovici, *The Secret of Laughter* (New York: Viking Press, 1933).
5. Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 125.
6. Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 125–26.
7. I have said more about some of these things (and less about others) in chapter 10 of my book, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments and Postscript.

Chapter 6

1. See particularly PF, chs. 2–3.
2. To avoid awkwardly repeating "or her" and similar locutions in this section I will write as if the "learner" is male, though of course Climacus's view implies that both men and women can be "disciples."
3. John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977).
4. Don Cupitt, "A Final Comment," in Hick, ed. *Myth of God Incarnate*, 204.
5. Cupitt, "A Final Comment."
6. There is an exception to this rejection. Some contributors claim the doctrine can be preserved and have a valid function as "myth." I shall analyze this suggestion later.
7. It is interesting to note that since writing for *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Cupitt has acknowledged his break with Christianity and even with theism. See his book, *Taking Leave of God*.
8. John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in Hick, ed. *Myth of God Incarnate*, 167–85, here 180.
9. Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," 183–84.
10. Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," 178.

11. Frances Young, " A Cloud of Witnesses," in Hick, ed. *Myth of God Incarnate*, 15–47, here 34.
12. Maurice Wiles, "Myth in Theology," in Hick, ed. *Myth of God Incarnate*, 148–66, here 161.

Chapter 7

1. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (2d ed.; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 36–50. I respond to this charge in chapter 2 of my *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love* and also in chapter 18 in this volume.
2. See Brand Blanshard, "Kierkegaard on Faith," in Gill, ed., *Essays on Kierkegaard*, 113–26.
3. All these claims can be found in PF, chs. 3–5.
4. The relationship between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms is a vexed one, which I will not attempt to resolve in this chapter. See my *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, ch. 1, for my views on the problem of pseudonymity. In this chapter, I sometimes speak of Kierkegaard and some of the pseudonyms interchangeably, particularly the Climacus pseudonym, because the charge of irrationalism made against Kierkegaard draws on the texts of these pseudonyms. One could defend Kierkegaard in such a case by arguing that the views of the pseudonyms are not his own. In principle such a defense is legitimate, but I do not think it is necessary in this case, though I do think that many of the comments made by the pseudonyms reflect their less-than-Christian status.
5. See David Swenson's classic *Something About Kierkegaard* (rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1945). Also see Alastair MacKinnon's "Kierkegaard: 'Paradox' and Irrationalism," in Gill, ed., *Essays on Kierkegaard*, 102–12 and his "Kierkegaard's Irrationalism Revisited," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 9 (1969): 165–76. Classic essays by Cornelio Fabro, "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic," and N. H. Søe, "Kierkegaard's Doctrine of the Paradox" can be found in *A Kierkegaard Critique* (ed. Johnson and Thulstrup, 156–206 and 207–27 respectively.
6. See Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 106–8.
7. See again Blanshard's article, "Kierkegaard on Faith," in Gill, ed., *Essays on Kierkegaard*.
8. Herbert Garelick, *The Anti-Christianity of Kierkegaard* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 28.
9. Louis Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1984), 136.
10. Pojman, *Logic of Subjectivity*, 137.
11. See, for example, the famous opening pages of SUD 13–14.
12. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Johannes Climacus describes existence as a "striving," which involves a "self-contradiction" (1:84).

13. For example, see CUP 1:183. It is worth noting that Alastair MacKinnon's computer studies of the Kierkegaardian text have shown that references to the incarnation as the absurd come almost exclusively from the pseudonymous authorship, which represents how the incarnation will appear to a non-Christian, and are almost nonexistent in Kierkegaard's nonpseudonymous writings. See Alastair MacKinnon, *The Kierkegaard Indices* (22 vols.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970–1975), particularly vols. 3 and 4.
14. For example, Hegel says that nature is a contradiction. See his *Philosophy of Nature* (trans. A. V. Miller; Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 17–22.
15. See Pojman, *Logic of Subjectivity*, 123.
16. Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds. *Faith and Rationality*, 16–91. (Hereafter abbreviated as "RBG").
17. See RBG, 78–82.
18. See PF 59–60, where Climacus defends these claims by a thought experiment in which he first imagines an individual with an overwhelming amount of evidence who lacks faith, and then a person with almost no evidence who nonetheless manages to have his life transformed by the encounter with the God.
19. Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray* (New York: Paulist, 1970), xii.
20. Louis Pojman makes this charge, for example, in *Religious Belief and the Will* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).
21. The following passage is crucial here: "If the teacher (the God) is to be the occasion that reminds the learner, he cannot assist him to recollect that he actually does know the truth. . . . That for which the teacher can become the occasion of his recollecting is that he is untruth. . . . To this act of consciousness, the Socratic principle applies: the teacher is only an occasion, whoever he may be, even if he is a God" (PF 14).
22. See especially the second section. The following quote is very typical: "The decisive mark of Christian suffering is the fact that it is voluntary, and that it is *the possibility of offence for the sufferer*" (PC 109; italics original).
23. The author wishes to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities (U.S.A.) for a fellowship which made this essay possible.

Chapter 8

1. By an "apologetic argument" I mean any argument intended to show the truth or reasonableness of Christian faith. This includes arguments designed to remove objections by clarifying Christianity so as to resolve apparent inconsistencies and eliminate misunderstandings. I regard arguments of this type as not merely directed to unbelievers, but as having value to believers as well. As will become apparent, Kierkegaard seems to have a narrower concept of apologetic argument, but my broader use will turn out to be essential to remove an apparent tension in his writings.
2. Throughout this essay I assume that the "thought-project" Climacus spins out in *Philosophical Fragments* is intended as an analogue to Christianity, and that

comments on such matters as the relation between the thought-project and reason are intended to illuminate the situation of Christianity.

3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (ed. and trans. Anton C. Pegis; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1:72.
4. An alternative, perhaps equally plausible interpretation, is to view the "X" as simply the difference between the Socratic and Christian views that the chapter as a whole tries to make clear. I prefer the narrower interpretation since it makes the argument more precise and easier to evaluate.
5. We must be careful here not to misunderstand the reply of the paradox. The paradox is agreeing, not that it is in fact absurd, but that it necessarily appears absurd to the reason or understanding. We must leave open the possibility that to the person of faith, the person who is not offended, the paradox is not absurd.
6. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1:72–73.
7. Of course there is some debate as to the range of an "orthodox Christian view of the incarnation." Climacus certainly makes no attempt to clarify the incarnation precisely, so it is not possible to say, e.g., that only fully Chalcedonian formulations of the doctrine qualify as orthodox. He says enough to make it clear, however, that some formulations would not count as orthodox. In particular, interpretations of the incarnation that understand Christ's divinity as a special, intensified case of a general divine-human unity (e.g., "Christ had a specially high sense of the consciousness of God that is potentially present in all humans") will not qualify as orthodox precisely because they are clearly Socratic. For Climacus the incarnation must be understood in a way that implies that Christ was uniquely divine and not simply possessing, in an exceptionally high or even unparalleled manner, some divine quality that generally belongs to the human race.
8. RBG, 58–59.
9. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, l.q.2, art. 2; l.q.12, art. 13. (Found e.g., in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas* [ed. with intro. by Anton C. Pegis; New York: Random House, 1945], 21, 111.)
10. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, l.q.2, art. 3. *Basic Writings*, 22–23.
11. For an example of a Christian apologist who seems to hold to such a view of history as scientific in character, see John Warwick Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past: An Introduction to Philosophical Historiography* (His History in Christian Perspective 1; Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1962).
12. See also the quick dismissal of this kind of argument in CUP 1:46–49.
13. Of course some contemporary thinkers, such as feminist theologians and process theologians, may be offended in some senses by classical theism and by classical natural theology, but they are not offended in the technical sense of Climacus.
14. For an excellent account of Kierkegaard's view of faith that shows how subtle it is by highlighting the role of faith as a transformation of the imagination rather

than simply an act of will, see M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

15. For a detailed discussion of the possible value of historical apologetic arguments within the framework of Johannes Climacus's basic views on how faith in an incarnate God is formed, see my *Passionate Reason*.

Chapter 9

1. See CUP 1:560–61 and 1:573 for passages that develop this theme of having God outside of one's religious consciousness.
2. Kierkegaard says something like this in CD 248–49.
3. See, for example, CUP 1:509–12.
4. M. J. Ferreira, "The Faith/History Problem and Kierkegaard's A Priori 'Proof,'" *Religious Studies* 23 (1987): 337–45.
5. See RBG, 46–47, for an account of what it is for a belief to be basic.
6. See PF 103, where Climacus says that "only the person who personally receives the condition from the God . . . believes."
7. I do not wish to deny here that in a wide enough sense of "evidence" this encounter which I describe as the ground could itself be viewed as evidence. In saying it is not evidence I mean first that it is not a propositional belief that has any logical relations to faith, and secondly that it does not form the basis for any process of inference by which the individual arrives at faith.
8. The following remarks are inspired by some points made with respect to religious experience by William Alston, in an unpublished paper "The Place of Experience in the Grounds of Religious Belief," delivered at a conference on "The Future of God" at Gordon College, Wenham, Mass., May 25–27, 1989. I do not wish to claim that Alston would endorse this use of his point.
9. See my "The Epistemological Significance of Transformative Religious Experience," *Faith and Philosophy* 8 n. 2 (1991): ##–##.
10. See David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 72–90, particularly 76–77.
11. See the discussion of the necessity of the past in the "Interlude" (PF 79–80).
12. See Acts 2:22 NIV.
13. The author wishes to thank the N. E. H. for a fellowship that made the writing of the original version of this essay possible.

Chapter 10

1. RBG, 16–93.
2. RBG, 39.
3. RBG, 48.
4. RBG, 18–19.
5. RBG, 81.
6. RBG, 82.

7. Compare RBG, 81, with the procedure of "the simple religious person" in CUP 1:177–79.
8. See RBG, 63–73. Plantinga himself does not appear to endorse this stronger claim about natural theology.
9. Obviously, there are other grounds for this judgment as well. Some of these I have discussed in my book *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript.
10. There are, however, hints of a broader epistemological theory which Plantinga developed in his Gifford lectures, and published in his three volumes on *Warrant*, a theory which seems to be inspired by Thomas Reid. This broader epistemological theory is implicit in Plantinga's remarks about the "ground" of properly basic beliefs, discussed later in this chapter.
11. Plantinga recognizes the possibility of mounting a challenge to belief in God on some other basis than classical foundationalism, but argues that this is unlikely to be achieved on a coherentist basis, and that the burden of proof would be on some other type of foundationalist to articulate his view and show that it rules out belief in God as properly basic. See RBG, 62–63.
12. Actually, it is not clear that Plantinga considers Aquinas to be a classical foundationalist. Aquinas appears to give a classical foundationalist account of *scientia*, which is generally translated "knowledge." It is possible, however, that what Aquinas refers to by this term is narrower than what contemporary philosophers refer to as knowledge. If so, then some things that are not known as *scientia* for Aquinas (such as some things believed by faith) might still be knowledge in a contemporary sense.
13. RBG, 55–59.
14. RBG, 59.
15. RBG, 60.
16. RBG, 72.
17. Terence Penelhum, *God and Skepticism* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1983).
18. Pojman, *Logic of Subjectivity*, 87–117.
19. Here one must carefully note the footnote on PF 16–17.
20. See Penelhum, *God and Skepticism*, 75–84.
21. RBG, 78.
22. RBG, 76.
23. RBG, 78–79
24. RBG, 79.
25. RBG, 79.
26. RBG, 80.
27. RBG, 80. Italics in original.
28. RBG, 66
29. RBG, 81.
30. A large section of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is devoted to exploring the nature of inwardness or subjectivity. See 1:129–251, 301–60, and 385–560 for fuller accounts of the themes in this paragraph.

31. I have attempted to do some of this job in my book *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, particularly ch. 4–9.

Chapter 11

1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (1011), IV.7. In *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (ed. Richard McKeown; trans. W. D. Ross; New York: Random House, 1968), 749.
2. Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitories* (The Fathers of the Church 7; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 270. Quoted in Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 143.
3. For a vigorous response to these claims see part 1 of Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; hereafter WCB). Also see (when it appears), Nicholas Wolterstorff's "From Presence to Practice: Mind, World, and Entitlement to Believe" (Gifford Lectures, St. Andrews, Scotland, delivered 1995; tentative title). Several important essays can be found in William Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
4. C. Stephen Evans, *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: The Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 204–7.
5. See Keith Lehrer's account of what he calls the "justification game" in his *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), 119–22.
6. See Thomas Reid's own memorable words: "A man that disbelieves his own existence is surely as unfit to be reasoned with, as a man that believes he is made of glass. There may be disorders in the human frame that may produce such extravagancies, but they will never be cured by reasoning." *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (ed. Derek R. Brookes; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 16. Compare Reid here with the sarcastic words of Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, who pokes fun at modern philosophers who have supposedly doubted everything (FT 5–7).
7. See W. V. O. Quine's seminal paper, "Epistemology Naturalized," in his *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 69–90. This essay and others on the theme of naturalized epistemology can be found in *Naturalizing Epistemology* (ed. Hilary Kornblith; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).
8. See Roderick Chisholm, "The Problem of the Criterion, " in his *The Foundation of Knowing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 14ff. For an introductory treatment, see his *Theory of Knowledge* (2d. ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), esp. 120–34.
9. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
10. See the passage from Reid quoted in n. 6 above.

11. See WCB, 67–134, where Plantinga discusses different forms of justification and rationality.
12. WCB, 498.
13. Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, 168–69.
14. For a defense of this claim, see my two books on the Climacus literature, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, and *Passionate Reason*.
15. WCB, 94–99.
16. WCB, 153–61.
17. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 1, ad. 1. Quoted in WCB, 170.
18. Calvin, quoted in WCB, 171.
19. WCB, 169.
20. WCB, 169.
21. WCB, 169–70.
22. WCB, 170. It is important to think about what some of these similar models might look like; that is, what variations can we imagine on Plantinga's model? I think one important difference is that in Plantinga's account the Church does not play a major role. An alternative account might certainly give the Church a more significant role.
23. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II, q. 2, a. 9, reply ob. 3. Quoted in WCB, 249. Emphasis added by Plantinga.
24. WCB, 243.
25. WCB, 243.
26. WCB, 243.
27. WCB, 244.
28. WCB, 252.
29. WCB, 247–48.
30. The above comment assumes that Aquinas's term *scientia* is correctly translated as "knowledge," as is commonly done. A strong case can be made, however, that such a translation is incorrect, and that by *scientia* Aquinas means something more restricted than the contemporary concept of knowledge, such as "scientifically demonstrated knowledge." If this is right, then it is possible that Aquinas might be willing to admit that in the broader sense of knowledge, what is grasped by faith amounts to knowledge, and then the apparent opposition to Calvin disappears. I owe this point to private correspondence with Plantinga, and I thank him for the insight.
31. WCB, 246.
32. WCB, 246n.
33. WCB, 246n.
34. WCB, 269.
35. WCB, 269.
36. WCB, 270.
37. See CUP 301–60, for an extended argument that thought alone cannot produce the passion necessary for action.
38. WCB, 270.

39. See my discussion of the theme of equality in *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, 87, 210, 269.
40. Strictly speaking, I reiterate that these words are not those of Kierkegaard but his pseudonym Johannes Climacus. I here assume that Climacus, though not a Christian, holds views on the relationship between faith and historical evidence that mirror Kierkegaard's own. For support for this assumption, see my *Passionate Reason*.
41. WCB, 270.
42. See my *Passionate Reason*, 96–109, for a detailed argument that Kierkegaard does not think a logical contradiction is implied by the Absolute Paradox. Of course Kierkegaard does call the incarnation a contradiction, but this term had a much wider meaning in nineteenth-century philosophy than it does today, and I think it can be shown that Kierkegaard does not mean a formal contradiction by doing so.
43. It is interesting to think of some New Testament critical scholarship as similar to such "inquisitorial treatment" that assumes an inquisitor's fixed idea.
44. WCB, 269.
45. WCB, 290–323.
46. WCB, 259.
47. WCB, 305.
48. David Hume, *An Inquiry concerning Human Understanding* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1956), 145. Quoted in WCB, 284.
49. WCB, 285
50. According to Howard Hong, Kierkegaard here draws on Hamann's *Schriften I–VIII* (ed. Friedrich Rotu; Berlin & Leipzig: 1821–1843), I, p. 425. See PF 337.
51. WCB, 285.
52. See PF 47–48, 54.
53. See PF 62: "The object of faith is not the teaching but the teacher," and CUP 1:379.
54. What follows is an extremely concise summary of my book, *Faith Beyond Reason* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
55. See William Alston, "On Knowing That We Know: The Application to Religious Knowledge," in Evans and Westphal, eds. *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, 15–39.

Chapter 12

1. Blanshard, "Kierkegaard on Faith," in Gill, ed. *Essays on Kierkegaard*, 113–25, here 118.
2. See chapter 7 in this volume, "Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist? Reason, Paradox, and Faith," and also my *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript.

3. I make no distinction, as do Hegelians, between *morality* and *ethics*, but use the two terms interchangeably.
4. Walter Lowrie, "Translator's Introduction," in Fear and Trembling *and* The Sickness unto Death (trans. Walter Lowrie; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 9–19, here 12.
5. The relation between the aesthetic and the ethical is itself complex, as "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage," in volume 2 of *Either/Or* (5–154) makes clear. The point of this essay is that the ethical life in some way includes or achieves what the aesthetic life tries to attain.
6. Kant can, I believe, be read as giving us a kind of thought experiment (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* [ed. and trans. Theodore M. Green and Hoyt H. Hudson; New York: Harper & Row, 1960]) to determine how much of historical faith can be incorporated into a religion of pure reason, rather than arguing for the superiority of the religion of pure reason. Yet I think the reading I am assuming in the text is historically more influential.
7. The claim that what is really distinctive about faith is that faith is able to receive Isaac back again has not generally been given the weight it deserves in discussions of *Fear and Trembling*. An excellent exception to this claim is an essay by Edward Mooney, "Getting Isaac Back: Ordeals and Reconciliations in *Fear and Trembling*," in Connell and Evans, eds. *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, 71–95.
8. The work of Eiriksson under the pseudonym Theophilus Nicolaus is discussed at length by Cornelio Fabro in his classic article, "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic," in Johnson and Thulstrup, eds., *A Kierkegaard Critique*, 179–90. Fabro in this essay translates extensive sections of Kierkegaard's reply to "Theophilus."
9. This shift in Kierkegaard's thinking is well illustrated in Bruce Kirmmse's book *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), and in articles by Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B," 110–29, and Eric Ziolkowski, "Don Quixote and Kierkegaard's Understanding of the Single Individual in Society," in Connell and Evans, eds. *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, 130–43.

Chapter 13

1. See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 177.
2. *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (trans. John K. Ryan; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), 43.
3. I believe this suggestion is in the spirit of Robert Adams's attempt to develop a divine-command theory of ethics, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," in *The Virtue of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97–122. See, e.g., the following comment from that essay: "What the

modified divine command theorist will hold, then, is that the believer values some things independently of their relation to God's commands, but that these valuations are not judgments of ethical right and wrong and do not of themselves imply judgments of ethical right and wrong" (108). Adams here makes plain his view that there can be judgments of value that do not presuppose a judgment of ethical rightness or wrongness.

4. Since my purpose here is to present a view I regard as Kierkegaardian but not necessarily Kierkegaard's, I quote from various pseudonyms of Kierkegaard and attribute these thoughts to "Kierkegaard" in this essay without attempting to settle any questions about whether these views were in fact held by Kierkegaard personally.
5. See SUD 121.
6. For more on the "soul-making" ethic developed in *Postscript*, see my *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, 73–92.

Chapter 14

1. Applewhite and his followers committed suicide in March of 1997, apparently in the belief that by so doing they would rendezvous with aliens on the Hale-Bopp comet.
2. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 182.
3. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 195.
4. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 272.
5. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 272.
6. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 282.
7. See, for example, the embarrassing introduction by Frederick Sontag to the Harper Torchbook edition of the Lowrie translation of *The Book on Adler*, published under the title *On Authority and Revelation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), vii–xl. Sontag clearly cannot quite understand how the author who has written so much about doubt, subjectivity, and the individual can be so committed to the concept of religious authority.
8. For the full story, see the Hongs' historical introduction in their translation of *The Book on Adler*.
9. See for example the classical discussion of faith offered by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*, where faith is described as believing what God has revealed because God has revealed it. This faith is also described as "believing for the sake of God" since its motivation is the achievement of that vision of God that is the final end for humans. See *Summa Theologiae* (trans. Mark D. Jordan; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 2–2, 2 A. 1 (65–68); 2–2, 2, 2 (69–70); 2–2, 3, A. 1 (95–96).
10. See Judges 7:1-8.
11. I am loosely paraphrasing PF 52.
12. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 70.
13. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 72.

14. The allusion is to I Corinthians 2:9, where Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4. See WL 24.
15. For arguments that Kierkegaard's concept of paradox, even the "Absolute Paradox," must be distinguished from a formal, logical contradiction, see my *Passionate Reason*, ch. 7. More recently, Westphal has made similar arguments in *Becoming a Self*, ch. 12.
16. BA 180, where it is said that "whether a police officer, for example, is a scoundrel or an upright man, as soon as he is on duty, he has authority." Someone who obeys a "government department" if it produces "witticisms" is "making a fool of the department" (BA 182).
17. See for example Kierkegaard's claim that while as a subject "I am to honor and obey the king," it is permissible for me to be "built up religiously" with the thought that "essentially I am a citizen of heaven," and as part of that kingdom I am equal with his majesty (BA 180–81).
18. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 73
19. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 7:4–5, 78–81.
20. See my discussion of Calvin's account in chapter 9 of my *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith*.
21. For a well-known example of such an externalist epistemology, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
22. See Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*.
23. Kant, *Religion within The Limits of Reason Alone*, 122–23; italics original.
24. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 152–53.
25. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 144.
26. For a good introduction to Chisholm's thinking on this topic, see "The Problem of the Criterion."

Chapter 15

1. In this chapter I shall treat the concepts of "self" and "person" as roughly synonymous, so that if some individual is or has a self, that individual is a person, and if some being is a person, then that being must have or be a self.
2. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), ix.
3. Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," in *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45–76, here 63.
4. Kierkegaard consistently rejects the notion of a *liberum arbitrium* understood as an ahistorical faculty that can choose between options to which it is essentially indifferent. See JP 2:1268.
5. See Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (trans. Ronald Gregor Smith; New York: Macmillan, 1965), 50.
6. G. W. E. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. by A. V. Miller; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111.

7. This critique of natural human love is found most clearly in WL 44–60.

Chapter 16

1. Though I cite the Hongs' pagination (SUD), here as elsewhere in this book I have used my own translation.
2. The typical cognitive psychologist views mental activity as information-processing in the brain. The part of this activity that "gets noticed" is consciousness. See Jonathan Winson, *Brain and Psyche: The Biology of the Unconscious* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), for a lucid account of this perspective, which relates this view to Freudian theory.
3. This early account can be found in several of Freud's writings; for example, see his *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (trans. James Stachey; New York: Norton, 1949).
4. See ch. 2 of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (trans. Hazel E. Barnes; intro. Mary Warnock; London: Routledge, 2003).
5. See Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (trans. Joan Riviere; rev. and ed. James Strachey; intro. Peter Gay; New York: Norton, 1989).
6. This account of Freud's relation to Groddeck is found in Harry Guntrip, *Psychoanalytic Theory, Therapy, and the Self* (London: Maresfield Library, 1985), 105.
7. See the previous note for Guntrip. Fairbairn's most significant work is *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (intro. David E. Scharff and Ellinor Fairbairn Birtles; London: Routledge, 1994).
8. Guntrip credits Melanie Klein for the first account of how this takes place. See ch. 3 in Guntrip, *Psychoanalytic Theory*.
9. For a good introduction to D. W. Winnicott's thought, see his *Mother and Child: A Primer of First Relationships* (New York: Basic Books, 1957).
10. See Guntrip, *Psychoanalytic Theory*, 191.
11. Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Psychology and Unconscious Despair," in Perkins, ed. *The Sickness unto Death*, 39–66.
12. Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Psychology," 49.
13. John Elrod, "Kierkegaard on Self and Society," in *Kierkegaardiana* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1955–), 11:178–96.
14. John Elrod, *Kierkegaard and Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 131–32.
15. Sylvia Walsh, "On 'Feminine' and 'Masculine' Forms of Despair," in Perkins, ed., *The Sickness unto Death* 121–34, here 125.
16. Walsh, "On 'Feminine,'" 126–27.
17. Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies*, 7.
18. Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies*, 8.
19. Guntrip, *Psychoanalytic Theory*, 191.
20. See Guntrip, *Psychoanalytic Theory*, 191.

21. This sentence comes from some comments by Merold Westphal on an earlier draft of this chapter. I am deeply in Westphal's debt for his suggestions.

Chapter 17

1. Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will.*
2. See Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will*, 143–48 for a fuller account of the following distinctions.
3. Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will*, 146.
4. Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will*, 179.
5. Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will,* 192.
6. Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will*, 158.
7. Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will*, 189.
8. Penelhum, *God and Skepticism,* 81–82, 114.
9. David Wisdo, "Kierkegaard on Belief, Faith, and Explanation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 21.2 (1987): 95–114.
10. I will not attempt in this essay to solve the vexed problem of the relation between Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms. Some have responded to attacks like Pojman's against Kierkegaard by attributing to the pseudonym the views attacked, and arguing that Kierkegaard does not hold them personally. In some cases this kind of response is correct, but I do not think so in this particular area. In any case, Kierkegaard is often attacked on the basis of what his pseudonym says, so it is worthwhile to see if he can be defended on the same basis. For my own solution to the problem of pseudonymity, see my *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, ch. 1.
11. See CUP 1:335n and FT 5–7.
12. *Fear and Trembling* develops at length this polemic about going further, not only with respect to faith, but also with respect to the doubts of the skeptic. Besides the section cited in the last note, see also FT 121–23.
13. See Aristotle's well-known definition of truth in his *Metaphysics* 1011b25.
14. See chapter 7 in this volume for a fuller treatment.
15. For a detailed argument for this position, see my *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, 212–44.
16. See, for example, the stress Climacus puts on a firsthand encounter in which the condition of faith is received from the God (PF 70).
17. This essay was originally written with the support of a Fellowship for College Teachers from the N. E. H.

Chapter 18

1. Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 3–48.
2. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 47.
3. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 40.

4. One writer who has perceived this clearly is George Stack, who has written two articles on Aristotle and Kierkegaard's understanding of choice. See "Kierkegaard's Analysis of Choice: The Aristotelian Model," *The Personalist* 52 (1971): 643–61; and "Aristotle and Kierkegaard's Concept of Choice," The Modern Schoolman 46 (1968): 11–23.
5. Donald Davidson's views are found in his famous "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," and other papers in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3–20. Alan Donagan's theory of action can be found in his *Choice: The Essential Element in Human Action* (London: Routledge, 1987). The following account of what I call the Aristotelian tradition in action theory is heavily indebted to Donagan's account.
6. At this point a natural objection to the notion of will suggests itself. If we say actions are events that are caused by acts of will, then what is the status of acts of will themselves? Are they also caused by acts of will? If so, a vicious regress appears to be in the offing. On the other hand, if acts of will are simply directly originated, why cannot the same be true of other actions? To respond to this objection, we must, I think, distinguish acts of will from full-blooded actions in the normal sense of the word action. An act of will is an actualization of a human capacity and in that sense is an act, but one can quite consistently hold that there are acts in that sense that are the causes of human actions in the fuller sense. Because in Kierkegaard's view as we shall see, there is a sense in which the act of will is the crucial element in the whole action, to the extent that it can be considered to be what the action really is, strictly speaking; it is understandable that there should be some confusion here. Perhaps the clearest way to view the matter is to distinguish an "ordinary language" sense of action, where actions frequently involve bodily movements (such as carrying out the garbage, closing the door), from those basic acts that are acts in a stricter philosophical sense. The former are caused by acts of will. The latter are originative in character and, in Kierkegaard's view, are in a sense the "true" actions (see the next section). These basic acts of willing are the locus of "agent causality" if I am right in interpreting Kierkegaard as a libertarian. (Again, see the discussion of this later in the text.) Hence, the infinite regress does not occur, because acts of will are originative. However, it is not arbitrary to say that ordinary actions are not originative in the same primitive way, because there is a basic difference in character between acts of will and actions in the full, ordinary sense.
7. See the following passage, for example: "If and when it [significance] comes, it is Providence that superimposes it upon his ethical striving within himself, and so it is not the fruit of his labor" (CUP 1:137).
8. Harry Frankfurt, "The Principle of Alternate Possibilities," *Journal of Philosophy* 64, no. 23 (1969): 829–39.
9. Donald Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" in his *Essays on Actions and Events*, 21–42.
10. Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" 41.

11. Davidson, "Intending," in his *Essays on Actions and Events*, 83–102, here 98.
12. Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" 99.
13. Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" 42.
14. "The laws whose existence is required if reasons are causes of actions do not, we may be sure, deal in the concepts in which rationalizations must deal" (Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," 17).
15. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 103.

Chapter 19

1. My own *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love* is an example of this development.

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